



**SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR  
SECOND ANNUAL**



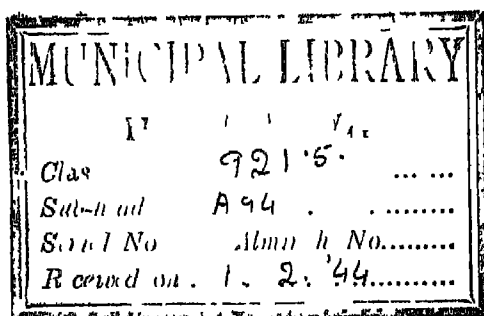
# SRI AUROBINDO MANDIR SECOND ANNUAL

*(15th August, 1943)*

ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE  
71ST BIRTHDAY OF SRI AUROBINDO

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*Dr. Amador*



## SRI AUROBINDO

If now at last thou art aflower in clay,  
How shall its gardeners be love-pledged to thee,  
Who wearest human mask for a deep play  
Sowing in dust thy Immortality?

Thou art a guest long-awaited of our earth,  
O everlasting solvent of dark pain,  
Bringing in storms thy message: a New birth  
Of coral isles beyond all shadow's stain!

Soul kept her vigil through her livelong nights,  
For the answer of thy Dawn how she implored  
Dumb Destiny to flash the Light of lights  
Reaving our veils of ignorance like a sword!

We can but clamour: 'tis for kings to give ;  
We fret and fume: the Gods alone appease ;  
We talk of faith declining to believe ;  
Prisoned in ash we cry for fire's increase.

The prayer is heard: thou art incarnate, Friend!  
Our right to blindness must we still defend?

8th May, 1943

DILIP KUMAR ROY



## NOW . . . .

Now that I have embraced Thy feet of light,  
The refuge of all earth whose mounting cry  
Has brought the succour of Thy victor might  
'To our Darkness-ridden deathful misery,

My drooping bower of life revives again,  
My desert-dearth is crowned with hope in spring,  
And all my being bathes in a rich rain  
Of blooms divine that thrill and make me sing ;

The sadness that had seized my heart of joy  
And buried all its brightness with deep gloom  
Is there no more to sicken and annoy  
My spirit which now towers above that tomb.

My sight was scaled by mists of gathered murk,  
But then Thy golden glory dawned on me :  
And now Thy quenchless suns are all at work :  
Dissolved are the blind nights revealingly.

Now one by one, my lotus-soul awake  
Unfolds the petals pure, O Grace Divine!  
That the beauty of Thy feet may wholly take  
Possession of my self and make it Thine.

PUNJALAL

# Lines of the Descent of Consciousness

BY NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

## I

'The world has been created by a descent of consciousness ; it maintains itself, it proceeds and develops through a series of descent. In fact creation itself is a descent, the first and original one, the descent of the supreme Reality into Matter and as Matter. The supreme Reality—the fount and origin of things and even that which is beyond—although essentially something absolute, indescribable, ineffable, indeterminable, has been, for purposes of the human understanding, signalised as a triune entity of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. That is to say, first of all, it *is*, it exists always and for ever—invariably, in unbroken continuity ; secondly, it exists not unconsciously, but consciously, in and as full consciousness ; thirdly, it exists in delight—through delight and for and as delight ; it has no other reason for existence but the pleasure and joy of simply existing. This primal, this original truth or reality transcends creation and is beyond and antecedent to it. What then is creation, what is its nature and character? Strange to say, it is the very opposite of the primal reality. First of all, it is not really existent: its existence is only another name for non-existence, as, in its phenomenal constitution, it is variable, ephemeral, transient and fragmentary or even seems made, as it were, of the stuff of dream. Secondly it is not conscious ; on the contrary, it is unconsciousness. And lastly it is not Delight ; there is an original insensibility and much undelight, grief and sorrow. That is the actual physical creation ; or so, at least, it appears to be. How is this paradox to be explained? What is the significance of this riddle?

Descent is the master-key that unravels the mystery—that is to say, the descent of the delight conscious existence as the material world. But why this descent at all? What was the need? What was the purpose? The *why* of a thing is always difficult, if not impossible, to gauge. But we shall try to understand the *how* of the phenomenon, and in so doing perhaps we may get at the *why* of it also. At present let us content ourselves by saying that such was His will—*la sua voluntade*—such

was His wish—*sa aichhat*. For once perhaps instead of saying, “let there be light”, He (or something in Him) must have said, “let there be darkness”, and there was Darkness.

But the point is, this darkness did not come all on a sudden but arrived gradually, through a developing process—we do not refer to physical time here but something antecedent, something parallel to it in another dimension. Let us see how it all came about.

The Absolute in its triple or triune status (not in its supreme being but as we see it prior to manifestation), is in essence and principle an infinity and unity. Indeed it is *the* infinite unity, and its fundamental character is a supreme and utter equality—*samam Brahma*. It is then a *status* or *stasis*, that is to say, a state of perfectly stable equilibrium in which there is no movement of difference or distinction, no ripple of high and low or ebb and flow, no mark of quantity or quality. It is a stilled sea of self-identity, a vast limitless or pure consciousness brooding in trance and immobility. And yet in the bosom of this ineffable and inviolable equality, in the very hush and lull there lies secreted an urge, a pressure, a possibility towards activity, variation and even an eventual inequality. For the presence and possibility of dynamism is posited by the very infinity of the Infinite, since without it, the Infinite would be incapable of motion, expression and fulfilment of its Force.

There is thus inherent in the vast inalienable equality of the absolute Reality, a Force which can bring out centres of pressure, nuclei of dynamism, nodes of modulation. It is precisely round these centres of precipitation that the original and basic unity crystallises itself and weaves a pattern of harmonious multiplicity. Consciousness, by self-pressure,—*tapas taptva*—turns its even and undifferentiated pristine equanimity into ripples and swirls, eddies and vortices of delight, matrices of creative activity. Thus, the One becomes Many by a process of self-concentration and self-limitation.

At the very outset when and where the Many has come out into manifestation in the One—here also it must be remembered that we are using a temporal figure in respect of an extra-temporal fact—there and then is formed a characteristic range of reality which is a perfect equation of the one and the many: that is to say, the one in becoming many still remains the same immaculate one in and through the many and likewise the many in spite of its manifoldness—and because of the special quality of the manifoldness—still continues to be the one in the

uttermost degree. It is the world of fundamental realities. Sri Aurobindo names it the Supermind or Gnosis. It is something higher than but distantly akin to Plato's world of Ideas or Noumena (*ideai*, *nooumena*) or to what Plotinus calls the first divine emanation (*nous*). These archetypal realities are realities of the Spirit, Idea-forces, truth-energies, the root consciousness-forms—*Rita chit*, in Vedic terminology. They are seed truths, the original mother-truths in the Divine Consciousness. They comprise the fundamental essential many aspects and formulations of an infinite Infinity. At this stage these do not come into clash or conflict, for here each contains all and the All contains each one in absolute unity and essential identity. Each individual formation is united with and partakes of the nature of the one supreme Reality. Although difference is born here, separation is not yet come. Variety is there, but not discord, individuality is there, not egoism. This is the first step of Descent, the earliest one—not, we must remind again, historically but psychologically and logically—the descent of the Transcendent into the Cosmic as the vast and varied Supermind—*chitra praketo ajanishtha vibhwa*—of the Absolute into the relational manifestation as *Vidyāshakti* (Gnosis).

The next steps, farther down or away, arrive when the drive towards differentiation and multiplication gathers momentum, becomes accentuated, and separation and isolation increase in degree and emphasis. The lines of individuation fall more and more apart from each other, tending to form closed circles, each confining more and more exclusively to itself, stressing its own particular and special value and function, in contradistinction to or even against other lines. Thus the descent or fall from the supermind leads, in the first instance, to the creation or appearance of the Overmind. It is the level of consciousness where the perfect balance of the One and the Many is disturbed and the emphasis begins to be laid on the many. The source of incompatibility between the two just starts here as if Many is not-One and One is not-Many. It is the beginning of Ignorance, Avidya, Maya. Still in the higher hemisphere of the Overmind, the sense of unity is yet maintained, although there is no longer the sense of absolute identity of the two they are experienced as complementaries, both form a harmony, a harmony as of different and distinct but conjoint notes. The Many has come forward, yet the unity is also there supporting it—the unity is an immanent godhead, controlling the patent reality of the Many. It is in the lower hemisphere of the Overmind that unity is

thrown into the background half-submerged, flickering, and the principle of multiplicity comes forward with all insistence. Division and rivalry are the characteristic marks of its organisation. Yet the unity does not disappear altogether; only it remains very much inactive, like a sleeping partner. It is not directly perceived and envisaged, not immediately felt but is evoked as a reminiscence. The Supermind, then, is the first crystallisation of the Infinite into individual centres; in the Overmind these centres at the outset become more exclusively individualised and then jealously self-centred.

The next step of descent is the Mind where the original unity and identity and harmony are disrupted to a yet greater degree, almost completely. The self-delimitation of consciousness—which is proper to the Supermind and even to the Overmind, at least in its higher domains—gives way to self-limitation, to intolerant egoism and solipsism. The consciousness withdraws from its high and wide sweep, narrows down to introvert orbits. The sense of unity in the mind is, at most, a thing of idealism and imagination; it is an abstract notion, a supposition and a deduction. Here we enter into the very arcana of Maya, the rightful possession of Ignorance. The individualities here have totally isolated and independent and mutually conflicting lines of movement. Hence the natural incapacity of mind, as it is said, to comprehend more than one object simultaneously. The Supermind and, less absolutely, the Overmind have a global and integral outlook: they can take in in its purview all at once the total assemblage of things, they differentiate but do not divide—the Supermind not all, the Overmind not categorically. The Mind has not this synthetic view, it proceeds analytically. It observes its object by division, taking the parts piecemeal, dismantling them, separating them, attending to each one at a time. And when it observes it fixes itself on one point, withdrawing its attention from all the rest. If it has to arrive at a synthesis, it can only do so by collating, aggregating and summing. Mental consciousness is thus narrowly one-pointed: and in narrowing itself, being farther away from the source it becomes obscurer, more and more outward gazing (*parāñkhanī*) and superficial. The One Absolute in its downward march towards multiplicity, fragmentation and partiality loses also gradually its subtlety, its suppleness, its refinement, becomes more and more obtuse, crude, rigid, dense.

Between the Overmind and the Mind proper, varying according to the degree of immixture of the two, according to

the degree of descent and of emergence of one and the other respectively, there are several levels of consciousness of which three main ones have been named and described by Sri Aurobindo. The first one nearest to the Overmind and the least contaminated by the Mind is pure Intuition; next, the intermediary one is called the Illumined Mind, and last comes the Higher Mind. They are all powers of the Overmind functioning in the Mind. The higher ranges are always more direct, intense, synthetic, dynamic than the lower ones where consciousness is slower, duller, more uncertain, more disintegrated. The lower the consciousness descends the more veiled it becomes, losing more and more the directness, the sureness, the intensity and force and the synthetic unity native to the highest ranges of our consciousness and being.

A further descent into obscurity occurs when consciousness passes from Mind to life. Darkness is almost visible here: there is a greater withdrawal on the part of each unit from its surrounding reality, a narrower concentration upon one's own separative existence—shades of the prison house have gathered close around. The light, already dulled and faint in the mind, has become a lurid glare here. Passion has arisen and desire and hunger and battle and combat.

Here also in the vital three ranges can be distinguished—the lower becoming more and more turbid and turbulent and fierce or more and more self-centred and selfish. These levels can best be seen by their impact on our vital being and formations there. The first, the highest one, the meeting or confluence of the Mind and the Vital is the Heart, the centre of emotion, the knot of the external or instrumental vehicle, of the frontal consciousness, behind which is born and hides the true individualised consciousness, the psyche. The mid-region is the Higher Vital consisting of larger (egoistic) dynamisms, such as high ambition, great enterprise, heroic courage, capacity for work, adventure, masterfulness, also such movements as sweeping violences, mighty hungers, intense arrogances. The physical seat of this movement is, as perhaps the *Tantras* would say, the domain ranging between the heart and the navel. Lower down ranges the Lower Vital which consists of small desires, petty hankerings, blind cravings—all urges and impulses that are more or less linked up with the body and move to gross physical satisfactions.

But always the Consciousness is driving towards a yet greater disintegration and fragmentation, obscuration and condensation

of self-oblivion. The last step in the process of transmutation or Involution is Matter where consciousness has wiped itself out or buried itself within so completely and thoroughly that it has become in its outward form totally dark, dense, hard, pulverised into mutually exclusive grains. The supreme luminous Will of Consciousness in its gradual descent and self-obliteration finally ends in a rigid process of mere mechanised drive.

This is, so far then, the original and primal line of descent. It is the line down which the Absolute Reality, the absolute Consciousness and the absolute Delight have turned into unreality and unconsciousness and undelight. But it is not all loss and debit. There is a credit side too. For it is only in this way, *viz.*, by the manifestation of utter Ignorance, that the supreme Absolute has become concrete, the Formless has entered into form, the Bodiless has found a body: what was originally an indeterminate equal Infinity of pure consciousness, has become determinate and dynamic in the individual multiplicity of corporeal consciousness. What is the sense in all that, what is the gain or upshot? We shall presently see.

When consciousness has reached the farthest limit of its opposite, when it has reduced itself to absolutely unconscious and mechanical atoms of matter, when the highest has descended into and become the lowest, then, by the very force of its downward drive, it has swung round and begun to mount up again. As it could not proceed farther on the downward gradient, having reached the extreme and ultimate limit of inconscience, consciousness had to turn round, as it were, by the very pressure of its inner impetus. First, then, there is a descent, a gradual involution, a veiling and closing up; next, an ascent, a gradual evolution, unfoldment and expression. We now see, however, that the last limit at the bottom—Matter—although appearing to be unconscious, is really not so: it is inconscient. That is to say, it holds consciousness secreted and involved within itself; it is, indeed, a special formulation of consciousness. It is the exclusive concentration of consciousness upon single points in itself: it is consciousness throwing itself out in scattered units and, by reason of separative identification with them and absorption into them, losing itself, forgetting itself in an absolute fixation of attention. The phenomenon is very similar to what happens when in the ordinary consciousness a worker while doing a work becomes so engrossed in it that he loses consciousness of himself, identifies himself with the work and in fact becomes the work, the visible resultant being a mechanical execution.

Now this imprisoned consciousness in Matter forces Matter to be conscious again when driven on the upward gradient. This tension creates a fire, as it were, in the heart of matter, a mighty combustion and whorl in the core of things, of which the blazing sun is an image and a symbol. All this pressure and heat and concussion and explosion mean a mighty struggle in matter to give birth to that which is within. Consciousness that is latent must be made patent; it must reveal itself in Matter and through Matter, making Matter its vehicle and embodiment. This is the mystery of the birth of Life, the first sprouting of consciousness in Matter. Life is half-awakened consciousness, consciousness yet in a dream state. Its earliest and most rudimentary manifestation is embodied in the plant or vegetable world. The submerged consciousness strives to come still further up, to express itself to a greater degree and in a clearer mode, to become more free and plastic in its movement; hence the appearance of the animal as the next higher formulation. Here consciousness delivers itself as a psyche, a rudimentary one, no doubt, a being of feeling and sensation, an elementary mentality playing in a field of vitalised Matter. Even then it is not satisfied with itself, it asks for a still more free and clear articulation: it is not satisfied, for it has not yet found its own level. Hence after the animal arrives man with a full-fledged Mind, with intelligence and self-consciousness and capacity for self-determination.

Thus we see that evolution, the unfolding of consciousness follows exactly the line of its involution, only the other way round: the mounting consciousness reascends step by step the same gradient, retraces the same path along which it descended. The descending steps are broadly speaking (1) Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, (2) Supermind and its secondary form Overmind, (3) Mind—(i) mind proper and (ii) the intermediary psyche, (4) Life, (5) Matter. The ascending consciousness starting from Matter rises into Life, passes on through Life and Psyche into Mind, driving towards the Supermind and Sachchidananda. At the present stage of evolution, consciousness has arrived at the higher levels of Mind; it is now striving to cross it altogether and enter the Overmind and the Supermind. It will not rest content until it arrives at the organisation in and through the Supermind: for that is the drive and purpose of Nature in the next cycle of evolution.

Physical science speaks of irreversibility and entropy in Nature's process. That is to say, it is stated that Nature is



rushing down and running down: she is falling irrevocably from a higher to an ever lower potential of energy. The machine that Nature is, is driven by energy made available by a break-up of parts and particles constituting its substance. This katabolic process cannot be stopped or retraced; it can end only when the break-up ceases at dead equilibrium. You cannot lead the river up the channel to its source, it moves inevitably, unceasingly towards the sea in which it exhausts itself and finds its last repose and—extinction. But whatever physical Science may say, the science of the spirit declares emphatically that Nature's process is reversible, that a growing entropy can be checked and countermanded: in other words, Nature's downward current resulting in a continual loss of energy and a break-up of substance is not the only process of her activity. This aspect is more than counterbalanced by another one of upward drive and building up, of re-energisation and reintegration. Indeed evolution, as we have explained it, is nothing but such a process of synthesis and new creation.

Evolution, which means the return movement of consciousness, consists, in its apparent and outward aspect, of two processes, or rather two parallel lines in a single process. First, there is the line of sublimation, that is to say, the lower purifies and modifies itself into the higher; the denser, the obscurer, the baser mode of consciousness is led into and becomes the finer, the clearer, the nobler mode. Thus it is that Matter rises into Life, Life into Psyche and Mind, Mind into Overmind and Supermind. Now this sublimation is not simply a process of refinement or elimination, something in the nature of our old Indian *nivritti* or *pratyāhāra*, or what Plotinus called *epistrophe* (a turning back, withdrawal or reabsorption): it includes and is attended by the process of integration also. That is to say, as the lower rises into the higher, the lower does not cease to exist thereby, it exists but lifted up into the higher, infused and modified by the higher. Thus when Matter yields Life, Matter is not destroyed: it means Life has appeared in Matter and exists in and through Matter and Matter thereby has attained a new mode and constitution, for it is no longer merely a bundle of chemical or mechanical reactions, it is instinct with life, it has become organic matter. Even so when Life arrives at Mind, it is not dissolved into Mind but both Life and Matter are taken up by the mental stuff, life becomes dynamic sentience and Matter is transformed into the grey substance of the brain. Matter thus has passed through a first transformation in life and a second

transformation in Mind ; it awaits other transformations in other levels beyond Mind. Likewise, Life has passed through a first transformation in Mind and there are stages in this transformation. In the plant, Life is in its original pristine mode ; in the animal, it has become sentient and centralised round a rudimentary desire-soul ; in man, life-force is taken up by the higher mind and intelligence giving birth to idealism and ambition, dynamisms of a forward looking purposive will.

We have, till now, spoken of the evolution of consciousness as a movement of ascension, consisting of a double process of sublimation and integration. But ascension itself is only one line of a yet another larger double process. For along with the visible movement of ascent, there is a hidden movement of descent. The ascent represents the pressure from below, the force of buoyancy exerted by the involved and secreted consciousness. But the mere drive from below is not sufficient all alone to bring out or establish the higher status. The higher status itself has to descend in order to be manifest. The urge from below is an aspiration, a yearning to move ever upward and forward ; but the precise goal, the status to be arrived at is not given there. The more or less vague and groping surge from below is canalised, it assumes a definite figure and shape, assumes a local habitation and a name when the higher descends at the crucial moment, takes the lower at its peak tide and fixes upon it its own norm and form. We have said that all the levels of consciousness are created—loosened out—by a first Descent ; but in the line of the first descent the only level that stands in front at the outset is Matter, all the other levels are created no doubt but remain invisible in the background, behind the gross veil of Matter. Each status stands confined, as it were, to its own region and bides its time when each will be summoned to concretise itself in Matter. Thus life was already there on the plane of life even when it did not manifest itself in matter, when mere matter, dead matter was the only apparent reality on the material plane. When matter was stirred and churned sufficiently so as to reach a certain tension and saturation, when it was raised to a certain degree of maturity, as it were, then life appeared: life appeared, not because that was the inevitable and unavoidable result of the churning, but because life descended from its own level to the level of matter and took matter up in its embrace. The churning, the development in matter was only the occasion, the condition precedent. For however much one may shake or churn matter, whatever change one may create

in it by a shuffling and reshuffling of its elements, one can never produce life by that alone. A new and unforeseen factor makes its appearance, precisely because it comes from elsewhere. It is true all the planes are imbedded, submerged, involved in the complex of Matter; but in point of fact all planes are involved in every other plane. The appearance or manifestation of a new plane is certainly prepared, made ready to the last—the last but one—degree by the urge of the inner, the latent mode of consciousness that is to be; still the actualisation, the bursting forth happens only when the thing that has to manifest itself descends, the actual form and pattern can be imprinted and established by that alone. Thus, again, when Life attains a certain level of growth and maturity, a certain tension and orientation—a definite vector, so to say, in the mathematical language—when it has, for example, sufficiently organised itself as a vehicle of the psychic element of consciousness, then it buds forth into Mind, but only when the Mind has descended upon it and into it. As in the previous stage, here also Life cannot produce Mind, cannot develop into Mind by any amount of mechanical or chemical operations within itself, by any amount of permutation and combination or commutation and culture of its constituent elements, unless it is seized on by Mind itself. After the Mind, the next higher grade of consciousness shall come by the same method and process, *viz.*, first by an uplifting of the mental consciousness—a certain widening and deepening and katharsis of the mental consciousness—and then by a descent, gradual or sudden, of the level or levels that lie above it.

This, then, is the nature of creation and its process. First, there is an Involution, a gradual foreshortening—a disintegration and concretisation, an exclusive concentration and self-oblivion—of consciousness, by which the various levels of diminishing consciousness are brought forth from the plenary light of the One Supreme Spirit, all the levels down to the complete eclipse in the unconsciousness of the multiple and disintegrate Matter. Next, there is an Evolution, that is to say, embodiment in matter of all these successive states, appearing one by one from the downmost to the topmost; Matter incarnates, all other states contribute to the incarnation and uphold it, the higher always transforming the lower in a new degree of consciousness.

Creation, the universe in its activity, is thus not simply a meaningless play, a pointless fancy. It has a purpose, an end, a goal, a fulfilment, and it follows naturally a definite pattern of process. The goal is the concretisation, the materialisation

(which includes, of course, vitalisation and mentalisation) of the Spirit and the spiritual values. It means the establishment of divine names and forms in terrestrial individuals leading a divine life, individually and collectively here below.

## II

We have so far spoken of two lines of descent. But in either case the descent was of a general and impersonal character. Consciousness was considered as a mere force, movement or quality. There is another aspect, however, in which the descent is of a particular and personal character and consciousness is not force or status only but conscious being or Person.

The various movements or forces of consciousness that play in the various fields or levels of creation are not merely states or degrees and magnitudes, currents and streams of consciousness: they are also personalities with definite forms and figures—not physical indeed, yet very definite even when subtle and fluidic. Thus the supreme Reality, which is usually described as the perfect status of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, is not merely a principle but a personality. It is the Supreme Person with his triune nature (Purushottama). It is the Divine as the supreme Knower and Doer or Creator and Lover. The creation in or from that status of consciousness is not simply a play or result of the force of consciousness, it is even more truly the embodiment of a conscious Will; it is the will of the Divine Father executed by the Divine Mother.

Now, as the Reality along with its consciousness, in the downward involutionary course towards materialisation, has been gradually disintegrating itself, multiplying itself, becoming more and more obscure and dense in separated and isolated units, even so the Person too has been following a parallel course of disintegration and multiplication and obscurity and isolation. At the origin lies, as we have said, the Perfect Person, the Supreme Person, in his dual aspect of Being and nature, appearing as the supreme *Purusha* and the supreme *Prakriti*, our Father and our Mother in the highest heaven.

Next is the domain of the Supermind with which the *manifestation* of the Divine starts. We have said it is the world of typical realities, of the first seed-realities, where the One and the Many are united and fused in each other, where the absolute unity of the Supreme maintains itself in undiminished magni-

tude and expresses and formulates itself perfectly in and through the original multiplicity. Here take birth the first personalities, absolute truth forms of the Divine. Here are the highest gods, the direct formations of the Divine himself. Here are the Four Powers and Personalities of *Ishwara* whom Sri Aurobindo has named after the Vaishnava terminology: (i) Mahāvira, embodying the Brahmin quality of Knowledge and Light and wide Consciousness, (ii) Balarama, embodying the Kshatriya quality of Force and intense dynamism, (iii) Pradyumna, embodying the quality of love and beauty—the Vaisya virtue of mutuality and harmony and solidarity, (iv) Aniruddha, embodying the Sudra quality of competent service—of organisation and execution in detail. Corresponding with these Four there are the other Four Powers and Personalities of the Divine Mother—*Ishwari*: (i) Maheshwari, (ii) Mahakali, (iii) Mahalakshmi and (iv) Mahasaraswati. Next in the downward gradient comes the Overmind where the individualised powers and personalities of the Divine tend to become self-sufficient and self-regarding; their absolute unity is loosened and the lines of multiplicity begin to be more independent of each other, each aiming at a special fulfilment of its own. Still the veil that is being drawn over the unity is yet transparent which continues to be sufficiently dynamic. This is the abode of the gods, the true and high gods: it is these that the Vedic Rishis appear to have envisaged and sought after. The all-gods (*Viśve devāḥ*) were indeed acknowledged to be but different names and forms of one supreme godhead (*devaḥ*): it is the one god, says Rishi Dirghatamas, who is called multifariously whether as Agni or Yama or Mātariśwān; it is the one god, again, who is described as having a thousand heads and a thousand feet. And yet they are separate entities, each has his own distinct and distinctive character and attribute, each demands a characteristic way of approach and worship. The tendency towards an exclusive stress is already at work on this level and it is the perception of this truth that lies behind the term *henotheism* used by European scholars to describe the Vedic Religion.

The next stage of devolution is the Mind proper. There or perhaps even before, on the lower reaches of the Overmind, the gods have become all quite separate,—self-centred, each bounded in his own particular sphere and horizon. The overmind gods—the true gods—are creators in a world of balanced or harmoniously held difference; they are powers that fashion each a special fulfilment, enhancing one another at the same

time (*parasparam bhāvayantah*). Between the Overmind and the Mind there is a class of lesser gods—they have been called “Formateurs”; they do not create in the strict sense of the term, they give form to what the anterior gods have created and projected. These form-makers that consolidate the encasement, fix definitely the image have most probably been envisaged in the Indian *dhyānamurtis*. But in the Mind the gods become still more fixed and rigid, “stereotyped”; the mental gods inspire exclusive systems, extreme and abstract generalisations, theories and principles and formulæ that, even when they seek to force and englobe all in their cast-iron mould, can hardly understand or tolerate each other.

Mind is the birth-place of absolute division and exclusivism—it is the “own home” of egoism. Egoism is that ignorant mode—a twist or knot of consciousness which cuts up the universal unity into disparate and antagonistic units: it creates isolated, mutually exclusive whorls in the harmonious rhythm and vast commonality of the one consciousness or conscious existence. The Sankhya speaks of the principle of ego coming or appearing after the principle of Vastness (*Mahat*). The Vast is the region above the Mind, where the unitary consciousness is still intact; with the appearance of the Mind has also appeared an intolerant self-engrossed individualism that culminates, as its extreme and violent expression, in the *Asura*—Asura, the mentalised vital being.

The Asura or the Titan stands where consciousness descends from the Mind into the Vital or Life-Force. He is the personification of ambition and authority and arrogance, he is the intolerant and absolute self-seeker—he is Daitya, the son of division. The Asura belongs to what we call the Higher Vital; but lower down in the Mid Vital, made wholly of unmixed life impulses, appear beings that are still less luminous, less controlled, more passionate, vehement and violent in their self-regarding appetite. They are the Rākshasas. If the Asura is perverse power, the Rākshasa is insatiate hunger.

All the ancient legends about a principle—and a personality—of Denial and Ignorance, of an Everlasting Nay—refer to this fact of a descending consciousness, a Fall. The Vedantic *Māyā*, spoken of sometimes as the Dark Mother, seems to be the personification of the lower Overmind. Jehovah and Satan of the Hebrews, Olympians and Titans of the Greeks, Arhiman and Arhumzad of old Iran, the sons of Diti and Aditi the Indian Puranas speak of, are powers and personalities of consciousness

when it has descended entirely into the mind and the vital where the division is complete. These lower reaches have completely lost the unitary consciousness ; still there are beings even here that have succeeded in maintaining it as a memory or an aspiration, although in a general way the living reality of the oneness is absent. It is significant that the term *asura* which came to mean in classical and mythological ages *a+sura*, not-god, the Titan, had originally a different connotation and etymology, *asu+ra*, one having force or strength, and was used as a general attribute of all the gods. The degradation in the sense of the word is a pointer to the spiritual Fall: Satan was once Lucifer, the bringer or bearer of light. We may mention in this connection that these beings of which we are speaking, dwelling in unseen worlds, are of two broad categories--(1) beings that are native to each plane and immutably confined and bound to that plane, and (2) those that extend their existence through many or all planes and assume on each plane the norm and form appropriate to that plane. But this is a problem of individual destiny with which we are not concerned at present.

We were speaking of the descent into the Vital, domain of dynamism, desire and hunger. The vital is also the field of some strong creative Powers who follow, or are in secret contact with, the line of unitary consciousness, who are open to influences from a deeper or higher or subtler consciousness. Along with the demons there is also a line of *daimona*, guardian angels, in the hierarchy of vital beings. Much of what is known as aesthetic or artistic creation derives its spirit from this sphere. Many of the gods of beauty and delight are denizens of this heaven. Gandharvas and Kinnaras are here, Dionysus and even Apollo perhaps (at least in their mythological aspect --in their occult reality they properly belong to the overmind which is the own home of the gods), many of the angels, seraphs and cherubs dwell here. In fact, the mythological heaven for the most part can be located in this region.

All this is comprised within what we term the Higher or the Middle Vital. In the lower vital, we have said, consciousness has become still more circumscribed, dark, ignorantly obstinate, disparately disintegrated. It is the seed-bed of lust and cruelty, of all that is small and petty and low and mean, all that is dirt and filth. It is here that we place the *Pisāchas*, djinns, ghouls and ghosts, and vampires, beings who possess the "possessed".

Further down in the scale where life-force touches Matter,

where Life is about to precipitate as Matter, appear beings of a still lower order, of smaller dimensions and magnitudes—imps, elfs, pixies, goblins, gnomes, fairies or dryads and naiads. There are even creatures or entities so close to Matter that they come into being and pass away with the building up and breaking of a definite pattern of material organisation. This individualisation of consciousness as beings or persons seems to disappear altogether when we enter the strictly material plane. There is here only an agglomeration of uniform dead particles.

We have thus far followed the course of the break-up of Personality, from the original one supreme Person, through a continuous process of multiplication and disintegration, of parcellation and crystallisation into more and more small self-centred units, until we reach the final pulverisation as purely material physico-chemical atoms. Now with the reversal of consciousness, in its return movement, we have again a process of growth and building up of individuality and personality; with the awakening and ascension of consciousness from level to level on the physical plane and in the material embodiment, there occurs too an evolution of the personal aspect of the reality.

We say that at the lowest level of involution, in Matter, where consciousness has zero magnitude, there is no personality or individuality. It is all a mechanical play of clashing particles that constantly fly apart or come together according to the force or the resultant of forces that act upon them. An individuality means a bounded form as its basis of reaction and a form that tends to persist and grow by assimilation: it means a centre of a definite manner and pattern of reaction. Individuality, in its literal sense, designates that which cannot be divided (*in + dividus*). Division is only another name for death for the particular entity. Even in the case of cell-division or self-division of some lower organisms, in the first instance the original living entity disappears and, secondly, the succeeding entities, created by division, always re-form themselves again into integral wholes. A material particle, on the other hand, is divisible *ad infinitum*. We have been able to divide even an atom (which means also *that which cannot be divided*) to such an extent as to reduce it to a mere charge of energy, nay, we have sublimated it to a geometrical point. Individualisation starts with the coming of life. It is a ganglion of life-force round which a particular system of action and reaction weaves itself. The characteristic of individuality is that each one is unique, each relates itself to others and to the environment in its own way,



each expresses itself, puts forth its energy, receives impacts from outside in a manner that distinguishes it from others. It is true this character of individuality is not very pronounced in the earlier or rudimentary forms of life. Still it is there: it grows and develops slowly along the ladder of evolution. Only in the higher animals it attains a clear and definite norm and form.

In man something else or something more happens. For man is not merely an individual, he is also a personality. He is the outcome of a twofold growth and revelation. He has outgrown the vital and climbed into Mind, and he has dived into the Heart and touched his inner soul, his true psychic centre. It is this soul that is the source of his personality.

The formulation or revelation of the Psyche marks another line of what we have been describing as the Descent of Consciousness. The phenomenon of individualisation has at its back the phenomenon of the growth of the Psyche. It is originally a spark or nucleus of consciousness thrown into matter that starts growing and organising itself behind the veil, in and through the movements and activities of the apparent vehicle consisting of the triple nexus of Body (Matter) and Life and Mind. The extreme root of the psychic growth extends perhaps right into the body consciousness or Matter but its real physical basis and tenement it found only with the growth and formation of the physical heart. And yet the psychic individuality behind the animal organisation is very rudimentary. All that can be said is that it is there, in potentia, it exists, it is simple *being*: it has not started *becoming*. This is man's especiality: in him the psychic begins to be dynamic, to be organised and to organise, it is a psychic personality that he possesses. Now this flowering of the psychic personality is due to an especial Descent, the descent of a Person from another level of consciousness. That Person (or Super-person) is the *Jivātman*, the Individual Self, the Central being of each individual formation. The Jivas are centres of multiplicity thrown up in the bosom of the Infinite Consciousness: it is the supreme consciousness eddying in unit formations to serve as the basis for the play of manifestation. They are not within the frame of the manifestation (as the typical formations in the Supermind are), they are above or beyond or beside it and stand there eternally and invariably in and as part and parcel of the one supreme reality—Sachchidananda. But the Jivatman from its own status casts its projection, representation, delegated formulation—"emanation", in the phraseology of the neo-Platonists—into the manifestation of the

triple complex of mind, life and body, that is to say, into the human vehicle, and stands behind as the psychic personality or the soul. This soul, we have seen, is a developing, organising focus of consciousness growing from below and come to its own in the human being: or we can put it the other way, that is to say, when it comes to its own, then the human being appears. And it has come to its own precisely by a descent of its own self from above, in the same manner as with the other descents already described. Now, this "coming to its own" means that it begins henceforth to exercise its royal power, its natural and inherent divine right, *viz.*, of consciously and directly controlling and organising its terrestrial kingdom composing body and life and mind. The exercise of conscious directive will, supported and illumined by a self-consciousness, that occurs with the advent of the Mind is a function of the Purusha, the Self-conscious being, in the Mind; but this self-conscious being has been able to come up, manifest itself and be active, because of pressure of the underlying psychic personality that has formed here.

Thus we have three characteristics of the human personality accruing from the psychic consciousness that supports and inspires it:—(1) self-consciousness: an animal acts, feels and even knows; but man knows that he acts, knows that he feels, knows even that he knows. This phenomenon of consciousness turning round upon itself is the hall-mark of the human being; (2) a conscious will holding together and harmonising, fashioning and integrating the whole external nature evolved till now; (3) a purposive drive, a deliberate and voluntary orientation towards a higher and ever higher status of individualisation and personalisation, —not only a horizontal movement seeking to embrace and organise the normal, the already attained level of consciousness, but also a vertical movement seeking to raise the level, altogether attain a new poise of higher organisation.

These characters, it is true, are not clear and pronounced, do not lie in front, at the beginning of the human personality. The normal human person has his psyche very much behind; but it is still there as *antaryāmin*, as the secret Inner Controller. And whatever the vagaries of the outer instruments or their slavery to the mode of Ignorance, in and through all that it is this Inner Guide that holds the rein and drives upward in the end.

Thus naturally there appear gradations of the human personality; as the consciousness in the human being rises higher and higher, the psychic centre organises a higher and

higher—a richer, wider, deeper—personality. The first great conversion, the first turning of the human personality to a new mode of life and living, that is to say, living even externally according to the inner truth and reality, the first attempt at a conscious harmonisation of the psychic consciousness with its surface agents and vehicles, is what is known as spiritual initiation. This may happen and it does happen even when man lives in his normal mental consciousness. But there is the possibility of growth and evolution and transformation of personality in higher and higher spiritual degrees through the upper reaches of the Higher Mind, the varying degrees of Overmind and finally the Supermind. These are the spheres, the fields, even the continents of the personality, but the stuff, the substance of the personality, the inner nucleus of consciousness—force is formed, first, by the flaming aspiration, the upward drive within the developing and increasing psychic being itself, and, secondly, by the descent to a greater and greater degree of the original Being from which it emanated. The final coalescence of the fully and integrally developed psychic being with the supreme splendour of its very source, the Jivatman, occurs in the Supermind. When this happens the supramental personality becomes incarnate in the physical body: Matter in the material plane is transformed into a radiant substance made of pure consciousness, the human personality becomes a living form of the Divine. Thus the wheel comes full circle: creation returns to the point from which it started but with an added significance, a new fulfilment.

The mystery of rebirth in the evolution of the human personality is nothing but the mystery of the developing Psyche. At first this psyche or soul is truly a being “no bigger than the thumb”—it is the hardly audible “still small voice”. The experiences of life—sweet or bitter, happy or unhappy, good or bad, howsoever they may appear to the outward eye and perception—all the dialectics of a terrestrial existence contribute to the growth and development of the psychic consciousness. Each span of life means a special degree or mode of growth necessitated by the inner demand and drive of the divine Individual seated within the heart. The whole end in view of this secret soul is to move always towards and be united again with its oversoul, its original and high archetype in the Divine Consciousness: the entire course of its earthly evolution is chalked and patterned by the exact need of its growth. Whatever happens in each particular life, all the currents of all the lives converge and

coalesce, and serve the psychic consciousness to swell in volume and intensity and be one with the Divine Consciousness. Or, in a different imagery, one can say that the multifarious experiences of various lives are as fuel to the Inner Fire—this Psychic Agni which is just a Spark or a thin tongue at the outset of the human evolutionary course ; but with the addition of fuel from life to life this Fire flames up, indeed, becomes ultimately a conflagration that burns and purifies the entire outer vehicle and transforms it into radiant matter—a fit receptacle, incarnation of the supernal Light. The mounting Fire (the consciousness-energy secreted in the earth-bound heart of Matter) finally flares up, discloses itself in its full amplitude and calls and attracts into it the incandescent supramental Solar Sphere which is the type and pattern it has to embody and express. 'This is the marriage of Heaven and Earth, of which the mystics all over the earth in all ages spoke and sang—to which the Vedic Rishi refers when he declares *Dyaus me pitā mātā prthivīriyam*.

'The supramentalisation of the personality which means the perfect divinisation of the personality, is yet not the final end of Nature's march. Her path is endless, since she follows the trail of infinity. There are still higher modes of consciousness, or, if they cannot properly be called higher, other modes of consciousness that lie in waiting to be brought out and placed and established in the front of terrestrial evolution. Only, supramentalisation means the definite crossing over from Ignorance, from every trace and shadow of Ignorance, into the abiding and perennial Knowledge and Freedom. Thenceforward the course of Nature's evolution may be more of the kind of expression than ascension ; for, beyond the supermind it is very difficult to speak of a higher or lower order of consciousness. Everything thereafter is in the full perfect light—the difference comes in the mode or manner or stress of expression. However, that is a problem with which we are not immediately concerned.

We have spoken of four lines of Descent in the evolution and organisation of consciousness. There yet remains a fifth line. It is more occult. It is really the secret of secrets, the *Supreme Secret*. It is the descent of the Divine Himself. The Divine, the supreme Person himself descends, not indirectly through emanations, projections, partial or lesser formulations, but directly in his own plenary self. He descends not as a disembodied force acting as a general movement, possessing, at the most, other objects and persons as its medium, or instru-

ment, but in an embodied form and in the fullness of his consciousness. The Indian word for Divine Incarnation *Avatāra* literally means *he who has descended*. The Divine comes down himself as a terrestrial being, on this material plane of ours, in order to raise the terrestrial and material Nature to a new status in her evolutionary course—even as He incarnated as the Great Boar who, with his mighty tusk, lifted a solid earth from out of the waters of Deluge. It is his purpose to effect an ascension of consciousness, a transmutation of being, to establish a truly New Order, a New Dharma, as it is termed (*dharma-saṁsthāpanārthāya*). On the human level, he appears as a human person—for two purposes. First of all, he shows, by example, how the ascension, the transmutation is to be effected, how a normal human being can rise from a lower status of consciousness to a higher one. The Divine is therefore known as the Lord of Yoga—for Yoga is the means and method by which one consciously uplifts oneself, unites oneself with the Higher Reality. The embodied Divine is the ideal and pattern: he shows the path, himself walks the path and man can follow, if he chooses. The Biblical conception of the Son of God—God made flesh—as the intermediary between the human and the Divine, declaring “I am the Way and the Goal”, expresses a very similar truth. The Divine takes a body for another - occult—reason also. It is this: Matter or terrestrial life cannot be changed,—changed radically, that is to say, *transformed*—by the pure spiritual consciousness alone, lying above or within: also it is not sufficient to bring about only that much of change in terrestrial life which can be effected by the mere spiritual force acting in a general way. It looks as if the physical transformation which is what is meant by an ascension or emergence in the evolutionary gradient were possible only by a physical impact embodying and canalising the spiritual force: it is with his physical body that the Divine Incarnation seems to push and lift up physical Nature to a new and higher status.

The occult seers declare that we are today on the earth at such a crisis of evolution. Earth and Man and man's earthly life need to be radically transfigured. The trouble and turbulence, the chaos and confusion that are now overwhelming this earth, indicate the acute tension before the release, the *détente* of a NEW MANIFESTATION.

# The Individual Self in the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

BY DR. K. C. VARADACHARI, M.A., Ph.D.

## I

The individual problem is the world problem. All enquiries into reality revolve round the status of the individual, the enquirer into the nature of reality who is a part and parcel of it. It is he who feels his bondage, and it is indeed he who seeks to surmount it and all that it connotes or signifies. The nature of the individual has itself been a real problem, for we find various explanations for his existence are given. The individual soul is said to be a part of the material nature or a simulacrum of spiritual ego or reality; its cognitive nature has been stated to be due to an accident of connexion with outer objects and not belonging to it as a sentience-point. Its substantiality has been questioned by some who called it but a congeries or constellation of cognitions, feelings and desireful volitions rather than a cognizer; its immortality has been seriously assailed; some have called it limited in duration to the period of segmentation of reality by some indescribable but real adjuncts; or to the period of veiling by *Māyā*. Thus the *Māyāvāda* and *Bhāskara* monists have throughout denied eternity to the individual soul; whilst the one granted reality to it during the period of its existence also, the other denied that too to it. *Nyāya* Philosophy affirmed its atomicity, a bare abstract spirituality bereft of consciousness when no objects are perceived or contacted; Buddhism denied its substantiality though it affirmed its real momentariness as a constellation, and pleaded for the acceptance of an ever-recurring continuity of the originations of this constellation as a series. In all the above systems there is no clear-cut need for postulating the existence of the soul or individual self at all nor its efforts to arrive at salvation.<sup>1</sup>

The individual soul is a psychic fact. We cannot however find any reasons whatever for postulating its immortality as an

<sup>1</sup> *Vedānta Sūtra* I. i. 4 (*Sri Bhāṣya*)

unchangeable spiritual entity, nor can we affirm its incarnations in matter in the theory of rebirths without any modification of its nature, as the theories of atomic abstract point-souls or monads or Māyāvāda or Buddhism affirm. There can be no theory of rebirth without a theory of immortality of the individual soul, and the acceptance of rebirth in their systems is unwarranted. Whether it is the materialistic theory or the superconscient theory of a Changeless Being or the Nihilistic theory, we arrive at one conclusion: "the apparent soul or spiritual individuality of the creature is not immortal in the sense of eternitiy, but has a beginning and an end in Time, is a creation by Māyā or by Nature Force or cosmic Action out of the Inconscient or Superconscient, and is therefore impermanent in its existence. In all three, rebirth is either unnecessary or else illusory; it is either the prolongation by repetition of an illusion, or it is an additional revolving wheel among the many wheels of the complex machinery of the Becoming, or it is excluded since a single birth is all that can be asked for by a conscious being fortuitously engendered as part of an inconscient creation." (*The Life Divine*: Vol. II, p. 690).

It is only in the realistic (who were also theistic) schools of Vedānta we have the acceptance of the reality and plurality of the individual souls, and their relationship to the One Divine Lord is not of such a kind as to involve at any time the abolition of the individuals. It is in *laya*, dissolution that they lose their activity so as to look as stones, inconscient, whilst in Liberation or *mukti* their relationship is one of perfect illumination of consciousness, with the Divine as their inner self and Lord from which state of ecstatic oneness or unity there can be no fall. The theory of rebirth in these theories is due to their beginningless ignorance or *anādi-pravāha-karma*, as a series of experiences of pleasure and pain, sorrows and strivings which perfect the individual or imperil its ascent into the kinds of births that make their devotion to the Divine perfect and incorruptible. The immortality of the individual souls is vouchsafed here in so far as their innate spiritual natures persist undispersed into original atoms of matter at death but continue the voyage interrupted here on other planes or return here itself. The soul beginning undoubtedly with little consciousness-vision in the lowest stratum of existence gets its consciousness purified and perfected or more properly enlarged till at the human level it is enabled to discriminate the real values of life from the false.

Growth is predicated of the soul not indeed in the sense that

it becomes big or vast as it ascends in the scale of existence according to the size of its body as the Jainas said, but intensively and extensively in terms of the ambit of consciousness or more truly *divya-jñāna*, superconsciousness till it becomes omniscient or omnipervasive. Even when occupying a body of matter this limit might be reached, for consciousness understood not as the human consciousness but as the highest consciousness identical with the Divine consciousness which knows no limitation at any time is eternally vast, illimitable, omniscient, omnipervasive, beneficent and puissant.

In the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo immortality of the individual soul is accepted and therefore its rebirths are also accepted. The purpose of the individual atomic soul in trying to achieve its real nature of immortality in and through the process of rebirths into matter and other lower forms of life is not explained as adequately as may be desired in the philosophies of realistic Vedānta. If *Māyā* had been inexplicable in *Māyāvāda*, it is no less true of the Karma. The explanation that it is inexplicable because its origination is unknown will not fully satisfy the seeker after a real and valuable explanation. We find in the philosophies of realisms too, *Māyā* gets a place if not as a deluding agent, at least as a power-concept or knowledge-concept. The creative act is one of Delight of Brahman or God. If creation is a deluding operative or degrading action or punitive expedition, it cannot be the Divine's action but of a Nero. It cannot be *līlā* whether understood as the Grace of the Divine or as the *Kridā* of the Divine.<sup>1</sup>

According to Sri Aurobindo "the Universe is a self-creative process of the Supreme Reality whose presence makes spirit the substance of things,—all things are there as the spirit's powers and means and forms of manifestation. An infinite existence, an infinite consciousness, an infinite force and will, an infinite delight of being is the Reality secret behind the appearances of the universe; its divine Supermind or Gnosis has arranged the cosmic order, but arranged it indirectly through the three subordinate and limiting terms of which we are conscious here, Mind, Life and Matter. The material universe is the lowest stage of a downward plunge of the manifestation, an involution of the manifested being of this triune Reality into an apparent nescience of itself, that which we now call the Inconscient; but out of this nescience the evolution of that manifested being into

<sup>1</sup> cf. my *Concept of Līlā*: JBHU. Vol. I. 1937.



a recovered self-awareness was from the very first inevitable. It was inevitable because *that which is involved must evolve*; for it is not only there as an existence, a force hidden in its apparent opposite, and every such force must in its inmost nature be moved to find itself, to realise itself, to release itself into play, but it is the reality of that which conceals it, it is the self which the Nescience has lost and which therefore it must be the whole secret meaning, the constant drift of its action to seek for and recover. *It is through the conscious individual being that this recovery is possible*; it is in him that the evolving consciousness becomes organised and capable of awaking to its own Reality. The immense importance of the individual being, which increases as he rises in the scale, is the most remarkable and significant fact of a universe which started without consciousness and without individuality in an undifferentiated Nescience. *This importance can only be justified if the Self as individual is no less real than the Self as cosmic Being or Spirit and both are powers of the Eternal.* It is only so that can be explained the necessity for the growth of the individual and his discovery of himself as a condition for the discovery of the cosmic self and consciousness and of the Supreme Reality. If we adopt this solution, this is the first result, the reality of the persistent individual; but from that first consequence the other result follows, that rebirth of some kind is no longer a possible machinery which may or may not be accepted, it *becomes a necessity*, an inevitable outcome of the root nature of our existence." (*ibid.*, pp. 703-4) (italics mine).

The above long extract is to put in clearest light the entire relevancy of the growth of the individual immortal soul from a concealed or veiled consciousness towards the superconscious consciousness of the Divine shaping its immortality with its ascent in the Organic through reducing the impenetrable and refractory Inconscient in a series of rebirths. The individual soul's delight it is, and not its karma, that mystifying force of bondage, beginningless and mechanical, that propels it to organize the Inconscient, plane by plane, and to integrate them in the single organism of his highest achievement—the Divine Body, pure, immortal too, a perfect instrument of its own inner light, truth, delight and Consciousness-power. Thus the individual soul in its involution and evolution is undoubtedly persistent, not in an unreal manner nor in the manner of a fictitious stream nor is it helplessly caught up in the vice-grip of a terrible fate or karma or kismet or *adriṣṭa*, wheeled forward

and backward from one place of existence to another. In fact, the individual soul is a shaper of its own inner law of ascent and descent for the sake of enjoying that secret delight of its existence even when it is being overwhelmed by the tribulations of its ascending journey. It is, at first appearance, a coarse, selfish aggressive egoism placed in opposition to matter, struggling for survival, against it as well as against all that came to be with it. Thus the philosophies that devote themselves exclusively to the realization of the Inner Transcendent Self or *Ātmā* or Brahman or the *Puruṣottama* are forced to explain their togetherness, opposition, and their indivisible solidarity in respect of genus, race or vocation or aspiration or need, with the other selves or souls which display the identical urge to transcend the limitations of environment, and seek to arrive at social harmony. It is therefore important to remember that the individual is not single but a multiplicity having within it the problems of unity and struggle and competition. In the modern world it is this aspect that is occupying a large portion of the thought of thinking men. Not without justice. The problem of social harmony and the individual freedom is not a simple calculus of gives and takes, but a real question of discovery of the foundations of our life, materially, vitally and spiritually, which can be the basis of our future ends or *puruṣārthas*. A material or economic equality is indeed necessary for all, equally a vital equality to work and endeavour as well as the spiritual equality in respect of transcendent goals of religious and cultural and artistic things. These are not all. But yet without these the individual is no more than an abstraction, a ghost that is without any vestige of actuality.

## II

There are two ways of approach in metaphysics in respect of the derivation of the social consciousness and the individual consciousness. The individual is derived from the homogeneous mass of Nature or the group of crowd as a gradual disruption of its unity through the unconscious localisation of interests of each part. The purpose of this disruption into many may be conceivable for the sake of greater social development which is indeed for the sake of social unity; such a unity impels its own self-divisioning into an infinite plurality. Such a thesis has to be accepted by all schools, whether they call this pluralization

real or unreal, temporary or permanent. The One-many problem is thus the rock on which absolutisms and phenomenalisms are wrecked.

The second way is to derive the social mass or homogeneity from the collections of individuals or the many through devices of absorption, subordination or subsumption, annihilation of uniquenesses in each individual or reduction to uniformity through impositions of conformity to routine law, and logically to evolve a general idea (*jāti*) which is hypostatized into a real thing. The social unity or unification is achieved as the inner necessity of the individual plurality. All pluralists are forced to accord to plurality a unity or God or harmony of co-existence or order of service so that they could be together in harmony without rift or divergent pulls. They too have to accept Unity or Oneness of the plurality whether they are prepared to call this real or unreal, temporary or permanent.

In both these ways there is inevitable the affirmation of evolution of the individual or the evolution of the social unity or Universe, the former involving the abolition of the society or mass uniformity or Nature in the raw, and the latter involving the abolition of the individual uniquenesses.

Sri Aurobindo finds that the truth of the Oneness is its eternal manyness, expressed or unexpressed in the texture of experience, whilst the truth of the manyness lies in their oneness, an eternal and compelling oneness that substands the divergent currents of life. Thus the individuals are not mere fragmentations or portions, sundered apart, of the Divine, but are charged intrinsically with the *nisus* to unity, even whilst the social homogeneity or Nature is impelled inconsciously to realise the infinite potentialities of manyness enfolded in it.

"For the initiation of the evolutionary emergence from the Inconscient works out by two forces, a secret cosmic consciousness and an individual consciousness manifest on the surface. The secret cosmic consciousness remains secret and subliminal to the surface individual, it organises itself on the surface by the creation of separate objects and beings. But while it organises the separate object and the body and mind of the individual being, it creates also collective powers of consciousness which are large subjective formations of cosmic Nature ; but it does not provide for them an organised mind and body, it bases them on the group of individuals, develops for them a group mind, a changing yet continuous group body." (*ibid.*, pp. 606-7).

These two movements are in the supramental Divine worked

out simultaneously from the realm of Nature or matter as a constant fulguration of its unity, and from the realm of souls as a constant effort at discovering the secret of unity. The soul's apparent finitude is the cause or reason for its search after a larger and profounder synthesis, not indeed in terms of the Nature from which it has emerged, as its owning a body reveals to it, but in terms of the spiritual Oneness interpenetrating all that exists.

Thus the perfection of the natural world with its diversities due to the individuating process within it that after all leads to the foundation of groups, and the perfection of the unifying impulse in souls due to their nîsus to Unity or transcendence of their differences, are what appear superficially as two opposite movements of evolution. It should be clear also that we cannot speak of the involutive and evolutive movements in respect of these two processes, for both these are really evolutive in so far as they are registering progress by throwing up the unique diversities of individuals on the one hand equipped with highly developed organic bodies and revealing heights of consciousness and intelligences far superior to the inconscience or nescience, and on the other hand, the individuals are evolving types of social organization from the crudest of associative groups to the spiritual utopia of *bhāgavatas*, souls forged in the fire Divine, lit within with the light Divine, free, joyous and true. Since these two movements are simultaneous or successive, "it follows that only as the individuals become more and more conscious can the group-being also become more and more conscious; the growth of the individual is the indispensable means for the inner growth as distinguished from the outer force and expansion of the collective being. This indeed is the dual importance of the individual that it is through him that the cosmic spirit organises its collective units and makes them self-expressive and progressive and through him that it raises Nature from the Inconscience to the Superconscience and exalts it to meet the transcendent." (*ibid.*, p. 607).

Thus the souls are in their highest development just the Divine in His manyness, upheld in the supramental unity of His Divine Oneness. They may be considered to be the infinite perfections of the Divine upheld by the Supreme Perfection of His Self-Identity in all of them, which is their solid reality, benediction, wherefore He is the *satyasya Satyam*. The essential delight of His nature makes all these souls in their unique multiplicity or individualities, seek that profound and ultimate and

everlasting plenitude of Delight that is of the Oneness. The seeking or searching or the divining of that Delight (*Vanam*, as the Kenopaniṣad puts it) is the nîsus of the individual souls, because they discover that to be their integral need for undiluted happiness. It is that which necessitates their realization of the delight in the Oneness even as they have in some measure realised their delight in His manyness. The One without the other ends in the realisation of an isolated and truly pathetic egoism or egoness, whilst the other alone stands in the gloom of Divine Solitariness, even as it has been described by the Upaniṣads. The metaphysical truth that Sri Aurobindo has pointed out in his formulation of the Advaita is that the multiplicity involved in Matter and in progress can find its fulfilment only in and through the Divine Oneness, and there its culmination does not mean annulment or liquidation or absorption but exaltation in the light, power, delight of the simultaneous experience of Oneness-Manness, which are both eternal and eternally true of the Supreme Being.

### III

The sufferings of the individual souls are the signs of their birth-throes, not signs of imperfection and finitude as such, for indeed there are no essential or intrinsic imperfections, but of the propelling inward need or drive to arrive at the formula of unity with the rest. One has to individualise oneself ere one can socialise oneself completely. This dual movement is always present. The individual soul is a concentration of the Total All so that it might in return arrive at the fullest diffusion of the Total All in and through its secret unity within it. We can understand thus the soul's voyage through material (*sic*) forms of matter, life and mind and overmind, so as to emerge as the patent one of the Many gathering within itself fully all the knowledge and delight inherent in the Total All as its essential *amśa*, or organ, through a series of rebirths, not meaningless rounds alone nor regressive rebirths compelled by the inexplicable Māyā or Karma or Avidyā. The fulfilment of the Universe is in the growing personality of the individual as a superconscious One of the Divine One in His eternal manness, unique significant *vibhūti*; fulfilling some supreme delight of His in the terrestrial movement or *līlā*. Rebirth need not at all times be a sign of decadence or descent into a lower form—a torture of dwelling in the

wombs of imperfect creatures ; it might as well be a deepening sense of oneness with Matter which is also spiritual, endowed with its riches of change and modifications, and convertibility. The birth of a soul in matter or material or vital form is, as it were, a sign of matter's essential transformability or transmutability. It is a secret of evolution of the individual's immortal pursuit ; it is not a sign of failure but a sign of integrative action brought about by processes of compensations and accelerations and retardations of some parts at the expense of other parts till in the long run, there emerges a full-blown integral personality that does not act in subordination to matter but controls and shapes it and exhibits its own true spiritual nature and thus achieves delight for itself in terms of its own being.

Thus whether it is the breaking up of social organizations or of individuals, there emerge constantly recurrences or rebirths of these social forms and individuals till the equation of the social perfection and individual integral perfection is realised in all levels of true spiritual being.

The relationship between the individual and the society appears at first look to be one of part and whole. The society is seeking its fulfilment in and through the individuals even as the fulfilment of the individuals is affirmed to consist in the fullest realisation of Society. The *aṅgāṅgī-bhāva* (whole and part relation) or *śeṣa-śeṣī* (dependent-principal relation) between the society and the individual is the highest that humanism has been able to offer as a consolation to the distraught world. Of course from the standpoint of the idealistic metaphysics the reality of the individual is only the society or the Absolute. Pluralistic idealism has in modern years affirmed that the individual has a uniqueness that is to be considered to be at its highest in harmony with the uniquenesses of other souls or personalities. The aim of philosophy is to present in clearest light the nature of the fundamental harmony that subsists between the souls. This harmony is something inherent in the very existence of the multiplicity but it is also necessary to make it conscious or superconscious in the individuals composing the society. Leibnitz affirmed a kind of ascent and descent of souls in the wheel of progress, but it was a kind of mechanical procession having in essence no necessity towards integral revelation of a full-blown personality. The *monadus monadum* was also in constant peril of losing its primacy to its successors, in the chain of process. The organic view, on the other hand, affirms the evolution of the individual from the simple mechanical structure

of the protoplasm to the highly diversified human organism characterised by mind, vital life and material organisation. The social life typical of the animal herds and cell-life such as the bee-hive or ant-colony, is one in which the unity is organic, for a loss of its central life, or member in the Queen Bee or Ant involves a total disruption of the entire colony. The earlier organisations of the human being dominated by the leadership of a King or Tyrant (*born*, not made) were very similar to the above vitalistic organisations and in this respect there is a lot of truth in the contention that the State is an Organism whose soul or head is the King or Tyrant or Dictator. This however is a condition that has not seen the emergence of individuals *qua* individuals. If in the words of M. Bergson<sup>1</sup> we consider the first development to be one moment of the dialectical frenzy, the exhaustion of this entails the second development of the individual effort at recovering his freedom that was inevitably and forcibly suppressed and stopped by the first. The specific descriptions of the twofold frenzy by M. Bergson do not bring out the metaphysical basis for the diversifications of functions in the organism or their unification or synthesis or integration in the light of the intuitive or supramental, in the individuals nor, for the matter of that, in the society developing its moral and religious life. In this respect he follows his own original thesis of instinct *versus* intellect, to explain the twofold frenzy of individual struggle after freedom from conformity to society and the social struggle for establishing uniformity and discipline in the lives of its members. In Sri Aurobindo's thesis, however, we have a clear enunciation of the metaphysical reality of the society as well as the integrity of the individuals through his unique thesis of eternal oneness in the eternal multiplicity, whether it be of the organism or the society, planes or powers, individuals or the Deity. It is this metaphysical basis that makes multiplicity seek the freedom for its many individuals even as the individuals are impelled towards some sort of unity wherein lies their strength. The two moments in the history of growth of individual freedom in society and achievement of social solidarity are, even when in frenzied movement, explained by his thesis.

The individual soul truly grows into a universal being, that is, a being having universal responsiveness and love and value for all, even as the universal Being is enabled to manifest itself in and through each of the individuals. The mystical conscious-

<sup>1</sup> *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, p. 256 f.

ness which is the pioneering spirit ever after adventure into planes and spaces beyond the intellect, according to M. Bergson, seeks to evolve into the universal consciousness by a leap or a burst into the same through concentration, not indeed of its consciousness nor by a surrender to the Divine All, but by the strength of its vital impulse (*élan vital*). This explanation does scant justice to the fundamental uniqueness of each soul and the continuity of evolution, as it aims at the abolition of the true individuality in the expanse of Mind-energy of the intuitive level. It forgets that the mystics are realists and are unique personalities who, in spite of their universal outlook and disinterested activity, are strong personalities. On the other hand, according to Sri Aurobindo, the individual is a real one of the eternal multiplicity of the Divine, mounting or ascending the evolutionary rungs by rejecting the lower with the help of the Divine, so that ultimately the lower may be orientated or transmuted so as to express more and more fully the higher and highest planes of the individual soul, which indeed is a Divine personality.

Thus the individual in the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo does not have merely a temporary existence nor is it a term in the phenomenal creation due to the operation of a *Māyā* or *upādhi*; on the other hand, it can be a portion, *amśa*, a ray, or organ of the Divine, if by these terms we understand an integral oneness of the soul with the Divine One in every respect as one of the eternal multiplicity. Thus it is that the individual soul is capable of realising the supreme formula of its identity with the Divine of Brahman in a real manner through a real evolution and a real surrender to the Divine which it apprehends to be its complementary and not a counter-reality.

The doctrine of limitational manifestation of Bhāskara has no place in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo for the individual is in no sense a gross perversion or segmentation of the seamless garment of Reality. The Brahman is indivisible and the limitation, even when real, cannot limit really. Nor is the fulgurational theory of Yādava Prakāśa any more in place, for the reason that Matter, souls and *Īśvara* cannot have the *nisus* or effort to recover their liberation. There can be no endeavour or aspiration in the souls nor in the inconscient matter towards the achievement of the evolutionary culmination in the Transcendent vision of the One-many Unity. The *Īśvara* is less than the All. Further, in both these systems the individual soul is impermanent. The *bhedābheda* or identity-difference theories



suffer usually from the defect of postulating identity and difference between the Divine One and the individual many and the multiplicity of Nature *simultaneously and unlimitedly*, that is to say, without reference to space and time or causality. In the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, the Original Nature of the Divine as an eternal oneness in eternal multiplicity rescues it from the attacks directed against the former schools. The One is eternally manifested in or motivating the many, whilst the many are manifesting or yearning to manifest the Oneness in the forms of harmony, organisation, unity or union of themselves. The many and the One are the one same Divine. The descent into matter, life, mind, overmind and the triple superminds above, as also the ascent worked out in terms of these seven planes by the eternal multiplicity of His nature does not entail the loss of the soul's nature as consciousness-delight—*Cidānanda-svarūpa*. On the contrary, this *Cidānanda* it is that is the informing principle in these planes which shapes the ascent of matter and the other succeeding grades of evolution to their own fullest possibilities as all great art reveals.

It may be asked with appropriateness whether this eternal multiplicity cannot be considered to be 'a body' (*śarīra*) of the Divine, a thing or entity that is absolutely existing for the sake of the Divine being supported and controlled and enjoyed by Him, whilst it is that which lives and moves and has its being in Him.<sup>1</sup> The view of Sri Aurobindo does not envisage this thesis of Ramanuja except indirectly. The many may be considered to be the body of the One but what is likely to be missed by the *śarīra-śarīrī-bhāva* even when it is considered to be *aprathaksiddha*, inseparable or eternal, is that there is the affirmation of the soul as a *śarīrī* in respect of its body whilst it has to be or play the role of the *śarīra* in respect of the Divine simultaneously for the purposes of an identical act. The individual soul then will become a passive or receptive conduit of the Infinite's Purposes. If we accept this we will be forced to accept or at least are open to a possible objection that the individual soul can be reduced to the status of a sheath of the Ātma (*jñāna-maya-kośa*, for example, as in Advaita), and this is certainly not what the eternal multiplicity is. It is true that Ramanuja was against this type of identification of the *jīva* or soul with a *kośa*

<sup>1</sup> *Sri Bhāṣya* : yasya cetanasya yad dravyam sarvātmanā svārthe niyantum dhārayitum ca śakyam yaccheṣataika svarūpam ca tat tasya śarīram. (II. i. 9).

and his definition of the *śarīra* does not lend itself to this interpretation.

If again we accept the Divine is resident in the heart of every self in the literal sense we shall have a dyarchy or dual government of the individual organism however harmonious their relationship might be through the willing and consecrated surrender of the individual soul to the Divine. Ramanuja saw clearly this possibility but it was inevitable in the ascent, as also in intimate union, to dislodge or absorb the individual into the One Divine.<sup>1</sup> The highest consciousness at which he arrived was the experience of love that means co-existence *samānādhi-karāṇya* in mystical consciousness.

In the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo since the individual souls are not impermanent, and are not sheaths but real eternal many of the Divine, and cannot be at any time merged or absorbed into the One except in the sense of being withdrawn into the potential condition (*sūkṣmāvasthā*), their freedom or liberation is the freedom in the One. This *mukti* is something that enriches the soul or the self and is different from the causal condition of potential existence, the inchoate homogeneity. The liberated condition in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is one rich integral omniplanal perfection lit with the experience of Seership. This is due to the evolutionary ascent of delight culminating in the double experience of multiplicity and oneness simultaneously. Such an experience is impossible in the mechanical dispensation of *ācchādana* or veilings or limitations, for according to the systems of *Māyā* and others, liberation is indistinguishable from *laya*, cosmic withdrawal, or when individually applied, *nirvāṇa*, cessation. Ramanuja saw clearly this truth even as Sri Aurobindo has. The evolutionary theory of Sri Aurobindo however grants to the eternal multiplicity of the Divine a possibility of the Vision of ultimate transformation and attainment of all that exists in the One Ātman, in and through Itself. Thus the radical affirmation of the oneness of the individual soul with the Divine is rendered possible. Such a unity-experience is impossible without the Divine being that in its multiplicity. The individual soul is in any case not originated nor annulled; it is a real individual, finite in so far as it is the many, but it is not because of that imperfect,

<sup>1</sup> The defect of *Kalpāṇā-gauravam* or multiplication of categories in violation of the principle of the Occam's razor is refuted by orthodox logicians in cases where the *Śruti* or *Śabda-pramāṇam* sanctions or affirms more categories in violation of the intellectual principle.

incapable of developing or evolving in process into the divine Nature. It is not the All though it is the All in its manyness. The Divine One in His totality is more than all the multiplicity put together, for He is not a college of souls nor a community of persons however evolved, perfected and harmonised in Divine Unity. The Transcendent transcends every height and group.

## IV

The individual soul or self or personality that we have so far described as one of the eternal multiplicity of the Divine, is not a bare point of consciousness, qualityless and contentless nor a false embodied creature whose one business it is to get rid of its imperfect and false body at the earliest possible moment nor is it a windowless monad incapable of becoming a master of the universe of matter, life and mind except impermanently and uncertainly, condemned to an eternal chain of successions in Ignorance or ever at the grim mercy and pleasure of the Inconscient Prakṛti. If this be not the destiny of the individual, and if his continuous commerce with Inconscience, vital and mental and overmental planes by means of his continuous births in them have meaning and value to his own superb destiny, that is to say, if he does indeed become enriched in every manner in every plane through an intimate and interior knowledge of these in his own widest actuality of terrestrial experience, then the individual is a unique personality manifesting divine life and perfection and eternity here and now, even in the body of matter, life, mind and overmind transformed in the Divine Light and Knowledge for the sake of the Delight. The true sense of immortality on all levels is attained since it no longer means mere persistence in or amid changes and stripping off of the sheaths which had covered the inner nature of the spiritual being. *Amṛtatva* is worked out possibly in terms of *Ānandatva* of Oneness of the multiplicity of the Divine, and not through descent into and ascent from Ignorance and Inconscience.

The destiny of the human individual is not to attain *after death* a transcendental or divine body (*aprākṛta-śarīra*) or to achieve a mergence or Divine Oneness after such a donning of the eternal luminous body, but even here to feel the Divine in oneself in His Oneness as also in His eternal multiplicity, and because of that presence undergo the changes in nature which are verily the formation of the *aprākṛta-divya-śarīra*. This is

the significant possibility of the indwellingness of the Supreme Divine '*superiorly*' in the individual through a radical surrender and prayer to Him. The *Jīvan-mukta* ideal is reinforced by the *siddha*-ideal, for it is not the *jīvan-mukta* of the Advaita Vedānta that we arrive at but a more integral realisation of the Divine Personality in the individual. This is so much the case that the final movement of the Total Liberation of all individuals, if indeed that should happen, will be such that the eternal multiplicity is to remain a multiplicity of perfect unique personalities of the Divine and would on no account become liquidated in the Oneness of the Divine on the principle of 'Identity of indiscernables' of Leibnitz.

Certain Western philosophers of the pluralistic school have canvassed the possibility of the ultimate society of such individuals being a-religious, a-theistic, a-moral and anarchistic. Some thinkers other than these have beheld the final emergence of a society to consist of children of God in a Heaven, blissfully enjoying the governance of God, the father, without being assailed by the forces of Evil which presumably have been permitted by the Divine to work a purgatory for the religious and a hell for the rest on Earth. Some theologians have hoped that after the attainment of salvation abandoning their bodies the freed souls would enjoy continuously the beatific glory, beauty and ecstasies of union, even as the eternally freed souls (*nitya-muktas*) of the Divine Godhead do. These thinkers envisage a community characterised by equality as between these freed souls, by freedom for each soul to manifest itself fully super-consciously and by a sense of fullness in stature, communion of love and delight.

Thus whether we have the political utopia of 'ingenuous philosophers outside history' or the theological utopias outside the temporal sojourn on this refractory planet, the fulfilment of the Divine consummation of integral all-sided existence is beyond the possibilities of the soul. In the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, the ideal of human unity is fashioned in the Superconscious life of each individual who has ascended and thereby fulfilled the mission set before himself at the beginning of the creature adventure to realise the divine pattern of his unique evolution of the Total All in the Divine, in His eternal multiplicity. The individual indeed becomes a *buddha* and a *siddha*, not in the sense of having attained to a state of *nirvāṇa* nor yet in the sense of possessing occult powers, but in the sense of fulfilling the Divine Eternity, Truth, Delight

and Reality in terms of the Divine Knowledge or Gnosis. In that supreme consummation there is *pūrṇatva*, fullness in the individual as it is in the Divine, constantly renewing the Divine activity of bliss and love and varied infinities of relationships, none of which limit to detriment, frustrate to annihilation or force into neurosis or veil to bind. Every individual personality of the Divine in his fullest vision perceives all as the play of the Divine and himself as the exponent of unique beauties and creative *māyās* of the Divine.

The mechanical theocratic government is not at all the truth of the Divine World Order, nor can it be the ideal of the gnostic individual. Nor is it the materialistic view of reality that develops into a type of communistic or fascistic or imperialistic competitive nostrums which promise all individual development, social harmony and efficient government. The constant peril under which our humanity lies is the peril of its own regression, due to excessive and ill-balanced application of the principles of government at the back of the above three kinds of Statc. Unless mankind is changed fundamentally inwardly, the individual who has been a child of the material evolution and vital aspiration will not be secure even in the humanity to which he has ascended. Mere rationalism or intellectualism has indeed been helpful and yet it has not been able to see the essential structure or shape of the evolutionary process. A pseudo-mystical religion or pseudo-religious mysticism may lead to the attainment on the part of one or more individuals to the top-point of human evolution but a fundamental change is impossible without the help of an education based on the essential reality of the Divine Evolutionism that is being worked out in terms of the conflict between the individual's freedom and social unity.

The divine nature must be achieved, and it can only be achieved with the help of the Divine in each individual (*antaryāmin*) who can and does perform the transformation and transvaluation of the individual's life at the conscious and willing surrender of the individual to Him of all his firm attachments to material, vital and mental assets. The Divine does not demand of the individual the surrender of his social life nor even the love that beautifies his ugly sufferings; what is demanded of him is the abnegation of all ways of material, vital and mental approach to them. A divine approach is all that is needed, and this cannot happen except through total surrender in freedom or through total self-giving. Without an intelligent

understanding of the divine situation and divine need, not all the rationalistic hopes of humanists will avail. A complete unification of society or rather the foundation of real society involves the recognition that the Divine is the Society of perfect individuals in His eternal manyness in terms of process of *līlā*, whilst His own eternal Oneness performs the office of the Divine Ruler—*Niyantā*. Both are real and both are to be realised by the striving soul if an integral realisation should happen.

The theory of classless society adverted to by many socialists and religious men, is when considered in the context of the highest evolution a matter of no great consequence, for in that state there can be nothing exploited or no one exploitable. An infinite diversity of functions will always remain which may however cast no shadow on the faces of others. Is it so strange then that in ancient Indian mythology its Gods have no shadows?

Sri Aurobindo's interest, and his main and abiding concern in all that he has given us, is in the future of the human individual, his race, and his prospects. In the Divine Life, Divine Race and Divine Unity he sees the secret founts of aspiration of man so far. His meridian or culmination is all that can make man yield his lower treasures, not once for all but only for a time, so that attaining he could descend to transform or even in ascending transform his world and society and relationships in the pattern of transcending delights.

ओं देवाय जन्मने

## THE MASTER

. . . . . till one greater Man  
Restore us and regain the blissful seat  
—Milton.

O Heaven's Unborn, incarnate on this earth,  
Immortal Bliss, crowning our mortal birth,  
To thee we offer heart's obeisance,  
Dim sparks of thy sun-haloed radiance!

Cast from our ancient heritage, we are  
Wandering from deep to deep like a lost star:  
A life of inner loneliness we lead,  
In our bosom shines the slumbering spirit-seed.

Our dreams are born of Time's ephemeral breath,  
Our hopes, pursued by shadow-wings of death;  
Pale like a waning moon, they leave behind  
A trail across the azure of the mind.

Always we move on, spurred by a blind will  
To live; dumb tools of the invisible  
Forces of Nature, we destroy or build,  
Our vision by the hands of Fate is sealed.

To lead us back to our home of felicity  
We have prayed through longing centuries to thee;  
At last thou hast come, O omnipotent Grace,  
And worn by thy God-love a human face!

O Heaven's Unborn, incarnate on this earth,  
Immortal Bliss, crowning our mortal birth,  
To thee we offer heart's obeisance  
Dim sparks of thy Sun-haloed radiance!

NIRODBARAN







# The Problem of Life and Sri Aurobinbo

BY DR. INDRA SEN, M.A., Ph.D.,  
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Particularly at this time, when the world is engaged in a catastrophic struggle and nearer home too, when we have had conflict on many hands, is the problem of human life most irresistibly forced upon us. We find men dying by the million and conflict ruthlessly carried to each civilian home. We feel terribly shaken and ask ourselves in relative desperation, is that the end and goal of our life? Our hearths and homes are razed to the ground by the sweep of a devastating war and we ask, is that the fate of the values which we have always sought to realise and conserve? We do not seem to have time for art, literature and philosophy and we inquire, what do we really live for? Men go to the battlefields, fight bravely for nation, country and great ideals, and if they return, they not infrequently become crazy and insane. We are horrified at the sight of them, and exclaim, this is worse than death!

The conflict as it is going on to-day is tremendous and proportionately great is the demand for a resolution of it. The war-weary world is looking forward to peace and we are already considering problems of the post-war reconstruction. It appears an almost radical revaluation of social and political values will take place. A new world seems to be on the anvil and taking shape, as it were. We feel surprised and slightly reassured by the feeling that perhaps we needed the terrible shock of such an unheard-of war to awaken us to a new sense of values. For the new construction that seems to be slowly arising perhaps all this destruction was necessary.

Sri Aurobindo has a unique perception of the realities of the war situation. Behind the array of fighting peoples and countries, on this side or that, he sees great world or cosmic forces in conflict. These forces are, to him, related to the evolutionary destiny of man. He not long ago wrote in a communication to a disciple saying "It is a struggle for an ideal

that has to establish itself in the life of humanity, for a truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance."

Evidently a great issue is at stake. But the conventional man is too much engrossed in his immediate needs to find time and interest for a reflection on life and its issue. The problem of life is a persistent problem of the philosophical mind and we ever ask its meaning under the changing vicissitudes of history. For the reflective person it is a question as much for the peace time as for the war situation. Human life in the individual as in society perpetually bristles up with unsolved problems and a thinker is powerfully struck by them and he cannot help asking what is the true meaning of life. But the radicalism of a war like the present may serve to shake the conventional self-complacency of even an average man and force him to think about life, its seekings and their validity, even as Arjun had to wait for a situation of the Kurukshetra battlefield to become self-conscious about life and its meaning. But for the vast hordes that had collected there even that emergency had become in some sense conventionalised so as to lose its value as a particularly sharp stimulus to set them thinking. The same is virtually happening to most of us now, who do not feel the war as the grave cultural crisis that it really is. But it is interesting to recall an observation of Sir Francis Younghusband, the famous author, who, while reporting about the rigours of war from his own experience of A.R.P. work in London, states that this great ordeal "has turned men's minds to God". What abiding value, we should like to ask, does man clutch at when all others seem to fail him? The Upanishadic seeker had in the world history a most remarkable daringness and tenacity in asking for the truth of his own self and the universal being. What is *Ātman*? What is *Brahman*? How is immortality to be attained? and what reality belongs to the world? are the questions which powerfully agitated his mind. He seems to have had a clear perception of their abiding worth and would not be deterred by any rival consideration of wealth and power from insistently asking for the meanings of those values. He has evidently a clear sense of the inadequacy of the ordinary life and its ideals and therefore seeks goals which are worth realising for their own sake. The Upanishadic literature depicts incident after incident of the most inspiring kind where the

*Jijnāsu* reveals a supreme grandeur of the soul, already possessed by him, in clearly appreciating the limitedness of our usual pursuits of wealth, honour, name and position and persistently asks of the *Guru* to initiate him into the knowledge of the *Ātman* and the *Brahman*. The seeker is not satisfied with anything but the very highest. Our ordinary ambitions are, indeed, petty. The Upanishadic seeker asks for *THAT* after attaining which all is attained and no further craving is left for getting this or that. He wants such knowledge as will light up the mystery of the whole existence. He wants a joy and satisfaction, which is complete and final. In this world of ours, he seeks the very fullness of being, joy and knowledge. Nothing short of a completely perfected life, entirely freed from its sense of inadequacy and limitedness, will really satisfy him. The modern man with his long practical preoccupation will demur at such ideology and will protestingly exclaim, that is all theoretical. After all a perfect life can have reality only in the imagination of man. The actual life is too imperfect and has to be like that. But this is too unfortunate. When we refuse to see the essential potentialities of our life, we can surely have no seeking for the realisation of them.

Sri Aurobindo reaffirms in a most vivid manner the reality of the Upanishadic seeking and that constitutes a striking contribution to our modern notions about life. In fact, he goes very much beyond all former spirituality in declaring that it is possible for man in this terrestrial life, and in this physical body, to attain complete Divinity. The world is not to be necessarily rejected for rising to the spiritual status. The whole world and society must be spiritualised. There is certainly nothing essentially evil about the world and the body. This is the vision of life that Sri Aurobindo sets about realising in perfect seriousness through his discipline of Yoga, which is the instrument for effecting the transformation from the present imperfect human nature to perfected Divine Nature. The whole truth of 'a kingdom of heaven on earth' is the objective and its attainability a definite possibility. In fact, says Sri Aurobindo, that is the inevitable evolutionary destiny of man and that stage is coming sooner rather than later. But our minds usually turn away from great ideals. They seem to us too distantly placed and we refuse to set ourselves even in the right attitude towards our final goal. Our very disbelief in our perfected happiness becomes our most serious handicap. Sri Aurobindo's own words on this subject are most heartening and elevating. "To know,

possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilit or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation—this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution.”<sup>1</sup> Further “if it be true that Spirit is involved in matter and apparent Nature is secret God, then the manifestation of the divine in himself and the realisation of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aims possible to man upon earth.”<sup>2</sup> The realisation of God within and without is not only the most legitimate aim for man, but also the necessary consequence of the process of evolution. As man succeeded the animal, so will he be followed by the superman, who will possess and manifest the higher divine consciousness in him. The implications of a harmonised consciousness are inherent in the division and conflict of human consciousness. This higher consciousness, according to Sri Aurobindo, has to come even as a necessity of evolution, through nature’s unconscious yoga, but in man the possibility of conscious yoga can greatly expedite the realisation of that ideal.

Here is evidently a message of tremendous hope, of all the hope of life and joy to man. It is assured he can virtually become a god, a being with a consciousness of full knowledge, joy and power. But the convention sits tight on our minds, the routine is inviolable and we find it awfully straining to think for ourselves. Psychologically a problem is said to arise when we are beset with a difficulty. And it is a situation of difficulty, which makes us think, so as to overcome it. A consciousness of the problem of life implies a sense for the essential issue and difficulty of life.

But is there a difficulty involved in human life? For the layman there are difficulties enough in life. There is frustration, deprivation, disease and death. But he accepts them as necessary incidents of life, grumbles awhile and then forgets them. His life psychologically consists in the first instance of a number of instinctive propensities such as hunger, sex etc. and then the

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

civilised life of society modifies these and creates in him some fresh susceptibilities for reputation, prestige, a moral and religious life and a lot more as represented in the customs and manners of the society. But his life is no harmonious whole. He thirsts for many 'goods' and satisfactions and strikes amongst them a working adjustment. Some money and wealth, some position and prestige and some religion and morals. That makes his scheme of life and in spite of its difficulties he dares not depart from it, because that commands the general social approval. That scheme, on the whole, works until life gets confronted with an unheard-of situation where convention itself fails to afford guidance.

This average life of man possesses a compromise sort of philosophy of its own. A vision of a single ultimate purpose, giving meaning to the individual acts of life, is absolutely lacking. Instead a plurality of goals which may and do conflict with one another is implicitly accepted. The social form is the highest ideal and the immediate needs the effective stimuli. Man thus, though having the capacity of looking before and after, largely lives in the present moment. It is with reference to such a life that Wordsworth's line "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers" has its special force and validity.

The man awakened to an independent curiosity regarding life will naturally act differently. The difficulties of it compel a deep thinking on the true meanings of life. Such a man finds himself driven from problem to problem until he feels he has to find an answer to the question, what is ultimately real? A conception of reality then, he expects, will give the true meaning of human life. He will perhaps in that moment realise the force of Tennyson's affirmation that to understand one petal of a flower one must know man, nature and God. Very much more must one understand nature and God and the whole reality to comprehend the meanings of human life.

Now what is the difficulty or the problem presented by man rather from the point of view of comprehensive reality? The question is, what is exactly the place that man occupies in reality or the relation he bears to the other terms of existence, *viz.* nature and God. Is man a product of nature with no higher destiny than that of the matter, out of which he has been fashioned, as says, *e.g.*, materialism. Or is nature too a manifestation of a universal consciousness so that man, though evolved by nature, contains a concealed or involved Divinity in him, to rise to which may be his real destiny? That is what the various

religious beliefs, more or less, affirm, as also the philosophical doctrine known as spiritualism or idealism. This is how the metaphysical problem of human life really arises.

But for one not metaphysically inclined life may become a pressing question altogether in an empirical way. A Gotama, for example, lost the conventional self-complacency of life through an experience of a sick man, a dying man and so on. Life became unbearable to him, inspite of the evident comforts of a prince's life and he preferred hunger and cold and untold suffering, but he could have no peace without the realisation of the true meaning of life. Many are roused to the problem of life through the death of a near one. And there are surely some intellectually inclined, who observe life and find tremendous contradictions and unexplained points in it and thus become seriously engaged in an inquiry as to the meaning of life. There are also cases of not a few who were awakened to a seeking of true living by some very simple incident.

Evidently perhaps no particular kind or kinds of experiences are necessary for a man to become conscious of the deeper potentialities of his life. Given certain general psychological conditions, an individual will very likely be struck by a higher possibility of life. Anything that intensifies his sense of inadequacy of the conventional life and its pursuit will evidently prepare the ground for the growth of a deeper seeking. Not without purpose then has spiritual teaching, at the outset, sought to emphasise the unreality of our ordinary social living of conventional pursuits. But a man will further require some curiosity and courage to search for another meaning of life. We suffer from life, groan under the weight of its difficulties, still ordinarily lack the courage to seriously ask for a fresh orientation of it. We accept the conventional solutions of our trouble and believe that none better really exist.

But history shows that, at times, when a great spiritual personality existed, who in his life demonstrated as it were, the joys and beauties of a higher life, the general people were more easily roused to a consciousness of inadequacy of the present life and a seeking for a truer life. The touch of a great Master is a more potent force in spiritual life than the ordinarily recognised influence of an example.

In recent times psycho-therapy and psycho-analysis have served to draw the scientific attention to the problem of human life. The phenomena of mental disorders and the relatively wide prevalence of nervousness as 'the disease of the age' force-

fully raises the question, how is life to be lived, what would be a proper management of life? The problem of life in this form is a live issue to-day. The plight of a neurasthenic patient is serious. He suffers from impossible sorts of anxieties, cannot go to sleep, and helplessly and aimlessly tossing about the night through, he thinks on. He is obliged to go to the new priest of the age—the psychologist, who tells him that the life has been mismanaged for long years and that a complete reorganisation and orientation of mental life is necessary. The patient goes through a discipline, a yoga, one can say, of modern psychology to recover his mental health. The facts of psychotherapeutic practice, to my mind, present the most unfavourable kind of practical criticism on the culture of the present time. We have now a mode and style of living, an ideology of life, which tends to produce in such a large measure a complete rupture and failure of life. A way of living which threatens man with insanity can surely not be itself sane.

Here is obviously a most serious symptom, unavoidable and compelling in its force to make us reflect upon life and its right and wrong management.

We have devoted, it will appear, an awfully long space to just raising the problem. But psychologically the raising of the problem is relatively far more important than the stating of its solution. And if our labour has in some measure succeeded in formulating and stimulating the problem, then, surely it has not been in vain.

Let us say that we have now some consciousness of our problem. That means that we do recognise the inadequacy of the customary and conventional view of it and do also further, by implication, recognise that there must be a consistent and satisfactory meaning discoverable in life. What is this more consistent and satisfactory meaning of life? We seek here primarily to present the solution of this problem, which Sri Aurobindo's prolonged intensive Yogic seeking and reflection have yielded to him.

It can be legitimately asked as to what is, in particular, the significance of Sri Aurobindo's answer. The problem being a persistent one, any number of answers have been offered since reflective thinking began in human history. That is true and still it is correct that the relative validity and importance of them widely vary. And to seekers each important solution must naturally be inviting and tempting. To the writer of this article Sri Aurobindo's answer has appealed in a number of ways.



The uniqueness of the intrinsic worth of the answer, philosophically considered, is the first point. Secondly, by the characteristic education and seeking of life Sri Aurobindo is among living personalities the man *par excellence* of the problem and issue of life. He is, therefore, our best interpreter on this fundamental subject. Truly has Romain Rolland, the famous biographer and humanitarian thinker, characterised him as "the completest synthesis that has been realised to this day, of the genius of Asia and the genius of Europe." He uniquely combines in himself the best intellectual culture of Europe, acquired through a long stay and exceptionally brilliant career of education there, with a most extraordinary passion and pursuit of yoga and the spiritual experience and wisdom of India. He is therefore pre-eminently the person to whom a modern man will turn for light on the meaning of life and existence. His life stands symbolised to me as an infinite aspiration for the completest and profoundest synthesis of life.

It therefore interests me deeply to invite those seeking the true meanings of life to the feast of solution which Sri Aurobindo offers to the contemporary world.

Is this life of man real or is it of the same stuff that dreams are made of? And is this stage of the world also real or illusory? If real, what is its true character? Are our human endeavours and seekings, too, real? Will our aspirations be fulfilled or which of them will be fulfilled and which are bound to be ultimately frustrated? In one word, human life, being a fact of total reality, we ask, what is it that truly exists?

According to Sri Aurobindo, the reality of the universe is *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda* or *Sachchidānanda*. It is characterised by the qualities of existence, consciousness and delight. It is the absolute which comprehends everything. It is a concrete absolute which gives validity to every detail of happening and existence and offers the best and the completest synthesis of all apparent contradictions. This absolute is the source and the end of all things. But while the absolute is ever perfect, it is nevertheless dynamic. Sri Aurobindo's absolute is a most remarkable conception. Philosophically one could say, it is an Absolute in an absolutely absolute way. It is governed by its own logic of the absolute, the logic of the finite and the relative being inadequate for it. The former conceptions of the Absolute in the history of philosophy have often suffered in one way or another from some taint of the relative. Here the Absolute is a real Absolute, which is personal as well impersonal, complete

and perfect as well as dynamic and evolutionary and an infinite lot more.

To a reader unaccustomed to philosophical language this description will appear too astounding. But the question here is of the total reality of the universe and that involves a number of complications. For our present purpose we must not permit ourselves to be confused, and should feel satisfied if we can recognise that at the root of all things there appears to be a supreme consciousness, which must comprehend full knowledge, highest delight and complete power.

The world, consisting of inanimate matter, plants, animals and man, is the dynamic expression of the Absolute. The successive stages of Matter, Life and Mind are the evolutionary stages, through which the Absolute is progressively rising to its own full self-consciousness. The very fact, assures Sri Aurobindo, that life seems to come out of matter and mind out of life, necessitates the conclusion that the last term of evolution must have been present as a potentiality from the beginning. Mind, which is at present the highest term of evolution, already seems to point to something higher than itself.

The rational mind of man working by logical judgments, as it does, also seems to reveal at times intuitive cognition of direct and certain knowledge. This power of intuitive and certain knowledge, affirms Sri Aurobindo, on the basis of both argument as well as personal yogic experience, is the essential quality of the next higher stage of evolution, which he calls supermind, as rationality is of the present mind of man. The progress of evolution seems to be towards the full realization of the Absolute Consciousness. It is the absolute returning to its own full self-consciousness after an enriched experience of an evolutionary process gone through. Since the last stage is the Absolute returning to its full self-consciousness, it must be supposed to be present in matter itself right at the initial stage. The matter is thus the Absolute involved, अन्नं ब्रह्म एव, Matter is Brahman, declared the Upanishad. Involution and evolution are thus the complementary processes of the world drama.

But what is the motive of the whole show? The love of the thing or self-delight or *Lilā*—that is the answer. A utilitarian age will find it hard to appreciate this motive as a possible goal to action at all. But a little reflection will show that the highest motive which man too realises in his moments of creativeness is just joy for the thing itself. An artist's delight in artistic creation is its own motive as well as the reward. That can be

the only motive conceivable for the Absolute in its activity of cosmic manifestation.

This is too abstrusely philosophical a statement. But it affords the ultimate background of existence for human life. The question may once again be asked, what is the meaning of life? Our answer can now be easily inferred from the above. This life is an essential part of a total reality which is absolute consciousness and delight. Thus in its ultimate potentiality this life is consciousness and joy. Human life is, further, at the moment the highest term of the cosmic evolutionary process, the previous stages of which are matter and life. Man, representing the manifestation of mind in evolution already anticipates the next higher stage, which is that of supermind. Mind is analytical, supermind, as affirmed on the basis of concrete Yogic experience and also as an inference from mind and the general character of the evolutionary process, will be intuitive, comprehending the spiritual unity of all. Our present consciousness is egoistic, that is, in the words of a great contemporary psychological authority, C. G. Jung, it is characterised by 'exclusiveness, selection and discrimination'. The next stage of supermind will be marked by comprehensiveness, unity and identity. That gives evidently the main purpose of our life and our endeavours and aspirations will naturally draw their meanings from their relation to this evolutionary purpose of our existence. The world, the stage of human activity and the evolutionary drama of the *SACHCHID-ANANDA*, is surely real. It is the artistic creation of the self-delight of the absolute consciousness. Life and the world have an earnest meaning in the self-expressing and self-realising activity of the ultimate reality. Sri Aurobindo's is, therefore, no philosophy of life-negation and world-negation. Still it does not want life at its animal or even human levels, but rather at the level or levels clearly indicated in the human, but yet only partially realised. The whole evolution is involved in the labour of forging ahead to the next higher stage, the super-rational or super-human or the stage of superman. There is an unconscious yoga or discipline working through all Nature, but in man consciousness becomes capable of being used intensively, so as to expedite the realization of the next higher stage. Sri Aurobindo's occupation with yoga has had just this single object, that of consciously and intensively preparing the ground and expediting through promoting a collective effort the realisation of the superman stage on earth.

The word superman has many European associations

attached to it, which will unfortunately altogether tend to pervert Sri Aurobindo's meaning. The superman to him is no magnification of the egoistic man, however great. It is qualitatively a new value in evolution, involving a complete supersession of the present egoistic consciousness, which, as we have said above, is divisive and exclusive. Supermind, the term we used to represent the consciousness of superman, is, on the other hand, intuitive, involving a perception of the spiritual unity of all reality. It is divine consciousness itself and the superman is an angel or god. A race of such supermen is in the making, affirms Sri Aurobindo, and the dream of a kingdom of heaven on earth will virtually come true. The present man, ignorant and grieving, is going to be replaced by a higher man, who will possess light, love and power. Such is the great message of hope and fulfilment which Sri Aurobindo has to offer to the world.

In recent times, more revolutions, social, political and economic have been packed together than has perhaps ever been the case in the past. Ours is the age of slogans and 'isms'. And we wonder if we are better for all or any of them, while each claims to be a panacea for all our ills. Sri Aurobindo's perception in this connection is very clear. According to his diagnosis the real cause of all our ills is our 'humanity', the egoistic mode of our consciousness. That consciousness itself does not permit us to see and recognise our real common good, that is why all our unities have to take the form of pacts and adjustments of give and take. A consciousness which would see the real identity in our existence alone could solve the differences of to-day. All our so-called solutions, though good in a way, appear to Sri Aurobindo as merest palliatives. He is, therefore, not interested in them and instead seeks the most radical of the radical solutions ever sought in history in aiming at a change in the mode of consciousness itself which is the real ultimate cause of our troubles and differences. This is bound to strike the reader as impossible, but it is just this 'impossibility' that Sri Aurobindo has been at, in perfect seriousness and earnestness, and confidently looks forward to the realisation of the imagined heaven on this very earth.

But what is going to be your contribution to this great change, Sri Aurobindo will ask and the reader perhaps will inquire, how is this epochal transformation going to be effected? Well, Yoga is the instrument of this change. Sri Aurobindo has naturally been long at testing and improving this instrument and in his comprehensive exposition, entitled "The Synthesis of

Yoga" through a comparative investigation of the various systems of yoga he has perfected a new instrument called by him the Integral Yoga. An essential psychological soundness is the principal merit of it, which, however, to be properly appreciated will require some practical experience.

Yoga is, with Sri Aurobindo, a very comprehensive term. "All life is Yoga." "In the right view of both life and yoga," says he, "all life is either consciously or subconsciously a yoga. For we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities of the being."<sup>1</sup> However in man this effort becomes self-conscious, through which the work of self-perfection can be carried on very much more swiftly and puissantly. More directly, Yoga, therefore, comes to mean this self-conscious effort at self-perfection. It is really an effort at the realisation of the spiritual possibilities of our life.

The concept 'spiritual life' carries with it usually a number of misgivings. Firstly, its contrast with worldly life is unfortunate. The separation between the two in the past has had the necessary effect of leaving worldly life relatively unspiritualised and the spiritual life devoid of proper content. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, however, contemplates spiritualisation of the entire life of man. "Our object is" says he, "to make the spiritual life and its experiences fully active and fully utilisable in the waking state and even in the normal use of functions."<sup>2</sup> Sri Aurobindo's yoga is also for the whole humanity, as it seeks to transform the consciousness of man as such, by making it a fuller expression of divine consciousness. The spirituality here contemplated, therefore, is not for the individual's release from life, though individual seekers may for a time, as needed by the circumstances of their yogic discipline, go into a relative seclusion from society. But the ultimate goal is always a complete transformation of the concrete whole life of man.

Sri Aurobindo's opinion regarding money reveals his correct attitude to the world in a most convincing form. "You must neither turn with an ascetic shrinking from the money power, the means it gives and the objects it brings", runs a passage, "nor cherish a *rajasic* attachment to them, or a spirit of enslaving self-indulgence in their gratification. Regard wealth simply as a power to be won for the Mother (The Divine) and placed at her service."<sup>3</sup> The correct Yogic attitude towards money is that "all

<sup>1</sup> Arya, Vol. I, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Arya, Vol. I, p. 246.

<sup>3</sup> The Mother, page 21.

wealth belongs to the Divine and those who hold it are trustees, not possessors."<sup>1</sup> Another passage is so inspiring and concretely elucidating that it may also be permitted here. "The ideal Sādhaka (Yogic student)", says Sri Aurobindo, "in this kind is one who if required to live poorly can so live and no sense of want will affect him or interfere with the full inner play of the divine consciousness, and if he is required to live richly, can so live and never for a moment fall into desire or attachment to his wealth or to the things that he uses or servitude to self-indulgence or a weak bondage to the habits that the possession of riches creates. The Divine Will is all for him and the Divine Ānanda."<sup>2</sup>

The relation of the individual to the society is a weak point in most forms of spiritual life. We have already indicated how with Sri Aurobindo's view of life and the world this is not the case. But we should like to state more clearly his position on this point. According to him "the right relation of the individual with the collectivity is neither to pursue egoistically his own material or mental progress or spiritual salvation without regard to his fellows, nor for the sake of the community to suppress or maim his proper development but to sum up in himself all its best and completest possibilities and pour them out by thought, action and all other means on his surroundings so that the whole race may approach nearer to attainment of its supreme personalities."<sup>3</sup> It may be noticed it is definitely affirmed that an individual may not even seek his spiritual salvation without regard to his fellows.

We should now be able to turn to the technique and the character of yogic process itself. We have already said this is the great instrument perfected by Sri Aurobindo in the course of over thirty years of experimentation and work for purposes of effecting transformation in man from the egoistic mode of consciousness to the divine or the universal consciousness. The Master's own words, in this connection, are clear and illuminating. "The process of yoga", says he "is a turning of the human soul from the egoistic state of consciousness absorbed in the outward appearances and attractions of things to a higher state in which the transcendent and universal consciousness can pour itself into the individual mould and transform it."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, page 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24 & 25.

<sup>3</sup> Arya, Vol. I, p. 174.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 369.

The question now is of the nature of the yogic process. Shall we recall for a moment from the earlier part of the essay that the problem of life for yoga exists, in the first instance, in the individual? The individual suffers from an inner disharmony and conflict, which yoga must remove. The numerous impulses of our life, which urge on individual gratifications, come into conflict with social prohibitions and press for a solution. Our processes of knowledge, will and emotion, show disparity, and a harmonisation has to be attempted amongst them. All these statements propound, in so many forms, the yogic issue and problem.

How does Yoga solve the problem? That is really done by an inner discipline, which takes its fundamental stand on a principle which is equally honoured by yoga as by modern psychology. 'The symptoms of the disease (mental) are willed by the patient.' This ranks perhaps as the greatest discovery of modern psychology as a whole. The point is that a neurasthenic suffers from, let us say, certain anxieties, because he derives some satisfaction from them. An exact corroboration of it one finds in Yoga. "Nothing can endure," declares Sri Aurobindo, "if it has not a will in our nature, a sanction of the Purusha, a sustained pleasure in some part of the being, even though it is a secret or a perverse pleasure, to keep it in continuance."<sup>1</sup>

That is to say, any thought that our mind chooses or an action that follows, takes place, because it has been willed by us. The solution of it will evidently lie in withdrawing or rejecting the 'will' from behind the thought or action. But how is that to be done?

Exactly there comes the technique of Yoga. Aspiration, rejection and opening oneself up to the higher consciousness constitute the triple process of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. When once it has been clearly recognised that the root of all that we think and do lies in our 'willing', then it will be easy to realise the ineffectivity of controlling life from the outside. One who continues to inwardly will a thing, but in bodily behaviour denies it, we get, what the Gita calls '*Mithyāchāra*', false behaviour. The right thing to do is to aim, while controlling behaviour, primarily at the modification and transformation of the will. This transformation is to be achieved through a sincere and a whole-hearted aspiration for the right will or the higher will, which progressively seeks delights of the spirit, the calmer

<sup>1</sup> The Life Divine, Vol. II, Pt. II, p. 149.

and serener joys of life rather than the violent pleasures of the senses and the body. Man's life is a clear picture of conflict and transition. We are animals, who have the capacity of becoming gods. And the way of our progress exactly consists in rising from the status of the animal instincts to that of the spirit, which will not reject the body and its pleasures, but transform and enhance them. To rise to that fuller status of the spirit or the soul is the aim of spiritual life and yoga. But obviously that calls for great patience and perseverance. However that is the only way in life for which any effort put in never goes wasted. The *yogabhrashta*, as says Krishna, is reborn under more favourable circumstances from where he can more easily go forward with the interrupted work of yoga.

An undying aspiration for the complete and full life of the soul-status is the main lever of the yogic transformation. Knock at the door and it shall be opened unto you, is the language of the Christian Scripture, stating the same essential idea. But the idea of the original and fundamental sin we do not countenance in Yoga. There are right movements and there are wrong movements in our being. The wrong ones, every time that they occur, must be readily noticed and sincerely rejected, and the right willing in place of them aspired for. Each such sincere rejection and aspiration will silently but surely perfect the change in you that you desire to produce. And you will before long begin to feel an increasing tendency to think and act in the right way spontaneously.

The third movement in the triple yogic process is opening oneself up to the Higher Consciousness. The task of a complete transformation of the lower nature into higher nature is the greatest and most adventurous of all undertakings. One who achieves it is greater than one who conquers the whole world. The accomplishment of such a thing will require calling into action the Supreme Consciousness of the universe. The individual gives himself up, surrenders or invokes and calls in the working of the Divine Consciousness for the complete change. It involves essentially an attitude of adoration and love for the Supreme Reality, with which a complete union and identification is sought by the human individual.

We might recapitulate here. We started by formulating the problem of life and that we attempted to do in a number of ways. We then sought to present Sri Aurobindo's answer and in doing so we stated his view of the ultimate reality, the conception of human life in the individual and the society, the



character of perfection and the nature of yoga as the instrument for its attainment.

It is obvious, reality and life have fundamentally been conceived as spiritual and perfection consists in the full realisation and expression of the spiritual potentialities of life and existence. The reader will see that the same or something similar is aimed at and attempted by religion. But there is a real difference between the religious and the yogic approach to the problem of life. To religion a "hereafter" is almost essential. 'Fear' and 'repentance' too play a very dominant part in religious life. Religion further involves rather a sharp contrast with secularism. Yoga demands of the individual, on the other hand, a dispassionate, *scientific* attitude towards life. Instead of sin it contemplates wrong movements in our nature, which have simply to be recognised, acknowledged, and wholeheartedly rejected. This must be done without shrinking and worrying. Fear is a weak attitude to be necessarily eliminated. A 'hereafter' like that of religion is irrelevant. Here and now and ever hereafter, that is what yoga aims at. Besides it claims the whole life. It can brook no departmentalisation. Ceremonial is to religion, at the least, an indispensable part. To yoga it is, however, at best, a secondary means, which the individual may use for a particular purpose of transformation in his experience.

If the above comparisons are carefully considered, it will be relatively easy to see that the yogic view of life and world above presented has an immense possibility for the future as a general instrument for human spiritual advancement and perfection. In fact it may prove to be an all-comprehensive future religion of spiritual life. At any rate, it does possess possibilities for the same. It can accommodate the varying ceremonials of different religions as means for certain experiences. It has an essential respect for the *scientific* attitude and does thereby assimilate the principal value of the scientific age. Lastly, it secures more effectively, here and now, and in the full sphere of life, the spiritual realisation, which all religions aspire after.

A treatment of the problem of life is bound to be rather grievously incomplete without a statement regarding the nature of evil. In an implied way our exposition has already said that pain, suffering and other evils while being real, are the incidents of our present stage of evolution. They are surely not final to our life. They are rather the obstacles and difficulties meant to be the touch-stones for discovering the persisting weak-

ness of our nature, so that they may be eliminated. The evil points out our weaknesses forcefully enough, by the pain that it causes, so that they may be attended to and eradicated.

Does Sri Aurobindo's philosophy paint the world and life in too rosy a colour? It presents, no doubt, the highest possible idealism, but in an extremely realistic spirit and manner. What is more important, it is not just a thought-construction. It furnishes also an effective instrument of yoga, which is unique to it, for testing and realising for onself the realisation of experience which it presents.

# Sri Aurobindo and the Religion of the Future

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I must congratulate the organizers of the Sri Aurobindo Pātha Mandir upon their enterprisc in bringing out another Annual this year. The yearly publication of a volume dealing with different aspects of Sri Aurobindo's teaching is perhaps the best way of bringing the vitalising thought of that great sage into contact with the main problems of life. One such main problem is the problem of religion. And here the chief problem is one concerning its future. What is the shape which religion will take in the future? What is to be the religion of the future? I propose to discuss briefly in this article what Sri Aurobindo has to say on this question.

It must be admitted that the problem of religion has become very acute in these days. From some countries she has been banished entirely. In some others she is just tolerated. Nowhere does she live a vigorous and independent life.

Why is this so? Why has religion fallen so low? What is the cause of her present decline? An investigation of this question is of importance, not only from the point of view of history, but also from that of the evolution of the human spirit.

It brings into view certain aspects of the evolution of the spirit which otherwise would have remained undetected. It is sheer nonsense to suggest that the decline of religion has been due to a cruel fate. The sooner religion gives up this sort of indolent, self-complacent attitude and turns the searchlight of inquiry upon herself, the better it will be for her and for the world.

For if she does this, she will discover that the cause of her present decline lies mainly in herself. She has lost her position because she has lost her spiritual force. Yes, it is a fact that she has lost her spiritual force. And no amount of weeping and bemoaning her sad fate can make her get rid of this fundamental and essential fact.

She is no longer the spiritual force that she once was. Part of it is due to inevitable causes connected with the nature of the evolutionary process. The course of the world's progress

necessitated the diversion of the spiritual force, which is at the root of the evolutionary process, into several channels. As a result of this, religion, which used to receive the whole of the spiritual force of evolution—for she was the sole repository of it and had no rival—had to share it with other branches of human culture, such as Science and Philosophy.

But it is chiefly due to religion's abuse of her position and her hostility to the separation from her of other lines of human spiritual activity. She occupied in the beginning, in fact, a totalitarian position. She was religion, science, philosophy, politics, sociology, etc., all rolled in one. Whatever spiritual activity there was in man was centred in her. She was the sole repository of the spiritual energy of mankind.

This envious position naturally could not last for ever. And indeed, it would have been a very bad thing for mankind if it had done so. For it would have meant a crippling of man's culture, as the full development of man's spiritual activity requires its free expression in as many ways as possible.

A totalitarian religion in fact is unthinkable under the present conditions of human development. And it is not good for religion either. For it is impossible, on account of the growth of so many special departments of human activity, for religion to try to control them without detriment to herself.

If religion had understood this earlier, all the quarrels between the Church and the State and between religion and philosophy, which have disfigured the pages of the history of the mediaeval age in Europe, would not have occurred. The quarrel between religion and science is of more recent origin, but it is born of the same spirit of jealousy and intolerance. Now, of course, it is religion which is the victim, but if she had not mercilessly persecuted science when she had power, it is doubtful whether science would have retaliated as she has done.

But my object is not to write a history of the quarrel between religion and philosophy or between religion and science, but to point out the lesson which this history teaches. It is that religion's proper rôle is not to assume a totalitarian attitude and try to control philosophy and science, but to concentrate on her proper function, which is to serve as the central reservoir of spiritual force.

Yes, this is the proper function of religion—to serve as such a central reservoir. Or rather, I would say, it is to serve as the central fire which feeds all other fires, for it is essentially dynamic and not static. Much of the confusion which the old

controversies between religion and philosophy and religion and science have generated will disappear, if it is remembered that religion is not a storehouse of knowledge, not a museum where isolated bits of information are carefully labelled and preserved, but a powerhouse of spiritual energy which is to supply this energy to all departments of human activity.

But what is the character of this central reservoir, this powerhouse of spiritual energy? It is indicated by the word 'Faith'. It is faith which is the dynamic spiritual energy which feeds all the other energies of man. And this faith is religion's own special domain. Or rather, this faith is religion.

I need not labour this point. It is sufficiently clear to those who have anything to do with creative work, whether in the department of philosophy or science or literature. It is faith which is the driving force of all such creative work. The scientist feels it, the philosopher feels it, the poet feels it, to name only three departments of human culture. Can the scientist achieve anything unless he has a burning faith in truth? And such a faith sometimes makes a fanatic of him. He is prepared to lay down his life for the sake of truth, and the history of science is full of records of the great martyrs who in the cause of truth have sacrificed their lives. The philosopher has also gladly mounted the scaffold or died at the stake for the sake of his burning love for truth, which is a matter of faith with him. The poet also in his way, though less spectacularly, stakes his all for the sake of his faith in truth, beauty and goodness.

Faith, then, is the great dynamic force behind all human activity. And that direction of human activity which makes faith its very self is religion. But faith must be faith in something. It cannot hang in mid-air. What is that towards which faith is directed? It is what we call Value, a term which unfortunately it is not possible to make more clear, for it is indefinable. It is nothing short of a tragedy—is it not?—that all the great and noble things which make life worth living, such as truth, goodness, beauty, etc., are all indefinable. In another place I have dealt with this, but here clearly I cannot discuss it and must content myself with the remark that it is a great tragedy.

However that may be, religion is faith in value. Perhaps I should say *values*, for there is not one value but several values. Faith in values, then, constitutes the essence of religion. Faith, when it is misdirected, when it does not point towards values,

but rather towards what is their opposite, namely, disvalues, is what we call fanaticism. Religion and fanaticism are alike, so far as faith is concerned, but differ *toto caelo* in the objects towards which their respective faiths are directed, for while the one faith is directed towards values, the other faith is directed towards anti-values.

But religion is not merely faith in values, but faith in the *realization* of values. Let me explain. Religion is not content with a mere otiose contemplation of values. She is interested in their realization. Values may exist, and may exist for eternity, but that is not the question for religion. It is rather a question, as we shall presently see, for philosophy. For religion the vital question is the realization of values.

I would have accepted Höffding's definition of religion as faith in the conservation of values, but for two reasons. In the first place, Höffding's definition rests upon the idea of a perpetual conflict between value and existence. Indeed, it is one of the central ideas of his philosophy that such a conflict exists. Now I cannot subscribe to this view. To my mind there cannot be any conflict between existence and value. Existence itself is a value, and values must also exist, or they will be nothing. Values, of course, have more than mere existence, but they must have that at least. When I say goodness is a value, I do, of course, mean that it has something more than existence, that it has a content which is not fully expressed by saying that it exists. But I mean certainly that it exists. My second objection to Höffding's definition is that it does not sufficiently bring out the dynamic character of religion. Conservation is a static concept; it indicates merely keeping things as they are. Realization is something far more dynamic; it indicates directly the creative function of faith. Realization does not merely conserve, but it creates, and it indicates a process which is eternal. Religion as faith in the realization of values, is continuously growing, continuously evolving. It is just the opposite of any static constancy. It is very necessary to understand this, for in what I shall say in the sequel, I shall have to emphasize mainly the evolutionary character of religion and the possibility—nay the certainty—of its rising to higher and higher levels.

But if religion is faith in the realization of values, what, it may be asked, is philosophy? What is the distinction between philosophy and religion? Philosophy I define as the universal science of values. It has two main tasks. The first is the discovery of the values, and the second is the estimation of them

and an integration of all experience in the light of them. It is not concerned with the realization of values. Whether values are realized or not, is a matter of complete indifference to it. Its attitude towards values, moreover, is not one of faith, but one of knowledge. Of course, faith is the driving force behind its quest, as it is behind all quests, as I have already explained. But that quest is a quest for knowledge, and not for faith.

Can there be conflict between religion and philosophy? Of course, there can be, as the history of the Middle Ages in Europe has shown. But that the conflict need not be a permanent feature of their relation with each other, is also proved by the history of our country, where these two most vital branches of human spiritual activity have always acted in closest co-operation with each other. Why has this been so in our country and why has the history of the Western countries a different story to tell? The reason is, that in our country the values which religion held most firmly, and in the realization of which she had intense faith, were also those which philosophy discovered to be the highest. Whether this was due to any pre-established harmony between religion and philosophy or was due only to a "gentlemen's agreement" between them, I need not discuss. Suffice it for me to say that the two have never quarrelled or never quarrelled to the extent to which they did in Europe. In Europe the conflict between them was due to the fact that many of the values which philosophy looked upon as most essential, were cried down by religion, while, on the other hand, many which were held in great esteem by religion were treated with scant respect by philosophy. As examples we may mention freedom and authority. Philosophy esteemed very highly the value of freedom, while religion looked down upon it. So again, authority, which was very highly prized by religion, was regarded by philosophy as an inferior value, if not treated as a disvalue.

Coming now to the relation between religion and ethics, the important thing to remember is that ethics is a branch of philosophy. As a branch of philosophy it is a theoretical study of values. It is not interested in the realization of values, as religion is. And it does not deal with faith but with knowledge. Its difference from philosophy is that it does not deal with all values, but only with some special ones, called moral values. Unfortunately, as we shall see in the sequel, religion is sometimes confused with ethics, a confusion which is not to the advantage of either and certainly is very much to the disadvantage of religion.

A word may be said here about the relation between religion and yoga. Both are concerned with the realization of values, but while religion is faith in such realization, yoga supplies the method by which this faith can be converted into an actual realization. Religion puts forward certain eternal values as objects, the realization of which is demanded by faith, but how they are to be realized, religion is powerless to indicate. It is here that yoga comes to the aid of religion. It shows the way in which these values are to be realized. In this sense yoga is “कर्मसु कौशलम्”, as the Bhagavadgītā says, the *karma* here being the actual realization of that which is put forward as an object of faith by religion.

The nature of religion and her relation to the sister disciplines being now understood, we are in a position to know what value to attach to various statements which are made by well-meaning critics about what religion is to do and what she is not to do. For instance, Prof. C. E. M. Joad, a very sympathetic critic of religion, has, in a book<sup>1</sup>, with the main sentiments of which I fully agree, mentioned two things which, in his view, religion must not do if she is to survive. What are these two things? He enumerates them as follows: “(a) It (religion) must not teach beliefs about the nature of the physical universe which science has shown to be false. (b) With regard to the non-physical universe, it must not teach as absolute truths dogmas which cannot be known to be either true or false, but which there is no reason to think true”. This statement of Prof. Joad is nothing more than a truism. Who has ever suggested that religion should teach things which have been proved to be false by science, or put forward as absolute truths things which are at best problematic? If religion ever did any of these foolish things, people would not have been content to administer a mild warning, such as Prof. Joad does, but would have banished religion completely from the realm.

Again, what is meant by saying, “If religion were to survive”? Who is to be the arbiter of her destiny? Is it Science? Is it settled beyond all possibility of dispute that in all questions concerning the right of things to survive, the judgment is always to be pronounced by science? If such a state of things is accepted as a settled fact, what remains there for either science or philosophy to do?

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Present and Future of Religion*, p. 212.



I am afraid I have expressed my views rather strongly, but this is because I feel a protest is needed against the rather facile assumption that religion must show her credentials to science. However, this is only a side issue into which I was led in the course of my remarks on the relation between religion and other human disciplines. Prof. Joad has not mentioned here (though he has done so elsewhere) the most important fact about religion, namely, that she is concerned with values and not with facts. It is not true facts or false facts which is the main issue here, but whether religion deals with facts or values.

One question which specially interests us in our country is how far religion is concerned with ritual and ceremony. Institutional religions have always had, as a necessary part of their organization, usages and customs, ritual and ceremony. For the same reason, however, for which we have seen religion must give up dabbling in facts, she must abandon her connection with ritual and ceremony. This is not to say that they are unnecessary. They certainly fulfil a very important function. But their importance is in the domain of social life, not in that of religion. It is true they are a part—and a very important part—of institutional religions. Institutional religions, however, have an inner core, which is the truly religious part of them, and which consists in nothing but pure faith. Over and above this inner core, they have what I may call an outer ring, where are deposited various things, social customs and usages, myths, legends, rites and ceremonies. The kernel is pure faith—faith in the realization of values. All those things that have gathered round the outer ring may be looked upon more or less as excrescences.

It is the nature of the values in which a religion is interested, which determines the type to which it belongs. The values which at present dominate the field of religion are mainly four, namely, the values of humanity, the values of inner realization, the values of the organic unity of man with the Greater Man in the universe, preached by the poet Tagore, and the values of the Superman, taught by Sri Aurobindo. Consequently, there are four types of religion which hold the field to-day, namely, (a) religion of humanity, (b) religion of mysticism or of individual realization, (c) Tagore's religion of man, and (d) Sri Aurobindo's religion of the Superman. Historically, there have been other types, such as physical religion, consisting in the worship of natural forces, and that kind of religion which consists in the worship of the Manes or spirits of ancestors, but these now

definitely belong to a superseded stage of evolution, and therefore do not call for any discussion here.

I will now briefly explain the method I will adopt in discussing these four types of religion. As my object is to find out what religion can be looked upon as the future religion, I shall give mainly a critical analysis of these different types, with a view to determining their relative merits. If this results in showing that one of these types is not only distinctly superior to the others, but is also their natural culmination and fulfilment, then this fact will be a sufficient warrant for our declaring that to be the future religion. The future religion must be the perfection and consummation of the previous types; she must not miss any of the values of the earlier types, but must take them up and transform them, adding at the same time some new values of her own.

#### (a) RELIGION OF HUMANITY

With these prefatory remarks I begin my examination of the four types of religion mentioned above. First, there is the religion of humanity, the origin of which is the celebrated *homo mensura* doctrine of Protagoras. This celebrated doctrine undoubtedly gave a new impetus to Greek thought, which previously had been mainly occupied with external nature. The Protagorean doctrine was the beginning of a great wave of humanism which swept over Greece for two centuries. In fact, Greek culture is known to this day as humanistic, though there are certain features in it, especially in the philosophy of Plato, which transcend humanism. The philosophy of the Stoics was not humanistic, though it shared the ethicism of the previous age, which was itself an offshoot of humanism.

In our country there never was a movement which was purely humanistic, though Buddhism, on account of the fact that there was no place for God in it, and also on account of the emphasis it laid upon ethics, is often spoken of as humanistic. But Buddhism had also its Absolute, which was Nirvāna or the Buddha, and its object was not the fullest development of the capacities of man, but rather the complete suppression of the sensuous part of man's life. In fact, what it advocated was the extirpation of all desires, which totally runs counter to the humanistic ideal of life.

In religion humanism gives rise to a kind of ethical religion, where the place of God is taken by humanity. It was therefore

given the characteristic title 'religion of humanity' by Auguste Comte, one of its chief champions. Humanity is here deified and conceived as a person. Its essential features are thus stated in a pamphlet<sup>2</sup>, quoted by Bridges, as follows:

"Positive religion has nothing to do with any supernatural or extra-terrestrial being ; it is the Religion of Humanity. The moral code of Positivism may be summed up thus: physical, intellectual and moral amelioration with the view of becoming more and more fit for the service of others. By *others* are understood three collective existences ranged in order of magnitude—the Family, the State, Humanity".

John Stuart Mill was also a champion of this religion of humanity. He indicated this very clearly in a letter to Comte<sup>3</sup>:

"It has been my lot, a rare one in my country, never to have believed in God, even when a child. I have always seen that the construction of a true philosophy of society was the only possible foundation on which a general regeneration of human morality could rest, and that the idea of Humanity was the only substitute for the idea of God". In his *Three Essays on Religion*<sup>4</sup> Mill similarly tried to show that this religion fulfilled all the requirements of religion.

The religion of humanity no doubt gives us a lofty conception of service of man, but this is a poor consolation for its depriving humanity of all chances of receiving inspiration from a higher source. Useful and elevating as the religion of the service of man is, it for ever pins man down to his present level. There is no hope in such a system for a radical transformation of the nature of man. The ethical religion which it preaches serves only to perpetuate, in a slightly improved form, the present institutions of man.

It would be a gross mistake to call the gospel of the service of man, which was preached by Sri Rāmakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekānanda, a religion of humanity. It is something far higher than this, for the service of man, as preached by these great saints, is only a deduction from the more general principle of the immanence of God in the universe. It is

<sup>2</sup> *Vide Illustrations of Positivism*, p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.

<sup>4</sup> See the second Essay *Utility of Religion* (p. 109), where Mill said : "The essence of religion is the strong and earnest direction of the emotions and desires towards an ideal object, recognized as of the highest excellence, and as rightfully paramount over all selfish objects of desire. This condition is fulfilled by the Religion of Humanity in as eminent a degree, and in as high a sense, as by the supernatural religions even in their best manifestations, and far more so than in any of their others."

Because every human being (given by them the significant appellation *Naranārāyaṇa*) is, according to them, a visible manifestation of God, that service of man becomes synonymous for them with service of God. The whole fabric of the religion of Rāmakrishna-Vivekānanda rests upon an intense faith in the realization of God, and is as far removed from the religion of humanity as anything possibly can be.

(b) RELIGION OF MYSTICISM OR INDIVIDUAL REALIZATION

Another type of religion which has been in vogue from time immemorial and which recently, thanks to Bergson, has received a new accession of strength, is the religion of mysticism or individual realization. This religion has, in fact, been historically the most popular religion in our country, with the exception of the religion of ritual and ceremony. In Europe it has survived only in the mystics, but recently it has been brought very much into prominence by Bergson. I have discussed elsewhere the philosophical implications of this religion, and shall only say a few words here about its shortcomings as a religion. Great as is the appeal of this religion of mysticism, it suffers from one fundamental defect, and that is that it misses the organic unity of the universe. It detaches the individual from the world, and believes that it is only in this detachment that the individual's higher realization is possible. This type of realization has been sought in our country for ages, but although it has produced a few higher individuals, it has not helped in any way the general evolution of the universe to a higher level. And this is because the gifted individuals have cut themselves adrift from the main currents of evolution, so that their influence has not been able to reach, except very indirectly, the world outside. From this point of view, the active mystics, as Bergson calls them, those whose realization refuses to confine itself within themselves, but expresses itself in many forms of social service, perhaps contribute more towards raising the level of world-evolution than the contemplative type, for they come more in contact with the world and are more interested in the uplift of the universe than the latter. But the contemplative mystic also can, if he so desires, create an atmosphere around him, which may draw other kindred souls into it, and thereby set up a higher sphere which is bound to have its repercussions upon the world outside. But this influence spreads very slowly, whereas

the social work of the active mystic produces more rapidly a change in the outside world.

But even the work of the active mystic cannot do much to raise the level of world-evolution, for the work that he does is social service which, as we have seen, only perpetuates certain conditions of human life as they exist to-day. It has not got the power to dynamise life, to galvanise it into a higher expression of itself.

The religion of mysticism, therefore, with all its immense possibilities of individual realization, must be pronounced to be a failure, so far as the general evolution of the universe is concerned. Moreover, individual realization also is immensely helped by cosmic realization. When the whole universe receives a new light and attains a new and higher status, individuals *ipso facto* attain a higher realization. This is the normal and natural way of obtaining a higher realization. The religion of mysticism substitutes for this normal way an abnormal one, namely, that of dissociating the individual completely from the rest of the world. It is at best therefore a freak, and is not of much value from the general evolutionary standpoint.

### (C) TAGORE'S RELIGION OF MAN

Tagore has outlined a religion which he has called the religion of man, which resembles in many respects the religion of humanity and the religion of mysticism, but also differs from both in many essentials. It resembles the former, in that it looks at religion from the point of view of man, but unlike it, it does not look at it from the point of view of the moral man only. It does not look upon social service as the goal of religion, but takes into account other aspects of man also, which have a deeper spiritual significance. For example, it believes in man's kinship with Nature, and feels a sort of exhilaration in the contemplation of beauty and sublimity as showing man's fundamental unity with the rest of creation. It is also, like mysticism, a religion of personal realization, but unlike it, it does not believe that the realization is only possible by a complete detachment of the individual from the world, but rather believes in a common ground between individual and cosmic realization. The individual realization of beauty and harmony, for example, it links with the cosmic realization of these values in Nature.

The essence of Tagore's religion consists in the recognition of a Higher Reality in intimate touch with man and defined in

terms of humanity. What it seeks is the meeting of the infinite and the finite in man. "It gives me a great joy", he says,<sup>5</sup> "to feel in my life detachment at the idea of a mystery of a meeting of the two in a creative comradeship. I felt that I had found my religion at last, the Religion of Man, in which the Infinite became defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and co-operation". This idea he expressed beautifully in a poem in the *Gītānjali*:

आमार एकला घरेर आङ्गल मेङ्ग  
विशाल भवे  
प्राणेर रये बाहिर ह'ते  
पारबो कवे ?

"When shall I break the walls of my private chamber and come out into the wide world, riding the chariot of life?"

As I have shown elsewhere<sup>6</sup>, there are two ways in which the union of the finite and the infinite can be effected in man. The first is by man coming out of his seclusion and bringing himself into union with the world. This is what is expressed in the above verse. The other is by God choosing to make man the vehicle of his expression. The second idea we also find in another poem in the *Gitanjali*:

सीमार माम्ने असीम, तुमि,  
बाजाओ आपन सुर ।  
आमार मध्ये तोमार प्रकाश  
ताइ एत मधुर ।

"Thou soundest Thy note, O Infinite, in the finite. That is why Thy manifestation is so sweet in me'.

This idea he further developed in his poem *Jivana Devatā*. The central idea of this poem is that there is in every man an indwelling Divine principle which is in intimate personal touch with all his feelings, thoughts and volitions. It is the inner guide and controller of all that he feels, all that he thinks, and all that he desires. But it does all this, not by remaining outside, like an external authority, but by being completely internal. In fact, it is man's partner in the great enterprise which we call

<sup>5</sup> *Vide Religion of Man*, p. 96.

<sup>6</sup> See the writer's article *Tagore's conception of the destiny of Man and his mission in life* ("Calcutta Review", Oct. 1941).

life. The Poet made this very clear in the following lines of this poem (I give the Poet's own translation):

"I know not why thou chosest me for thy partner,  
                                     Lord of my life!  
 Didst thou show my days and nights,  
 My deeds and dreams for the alchemy of thy art,  
 And string in the chain of thy music my songs of autumn  
   and spring,  
 And gather the flowers from my mature moments  
   for thy crown?"

This intimate personal touch with God is the chief note of his religion. It was the privilege of man, he thought, to be always in such intimate touch. His religion must therefore exhibit it; it must be nothing else than an expression of this intimate contact.

This is another reason why we must say that Tagore's religion is very different from the religion of humanity. Its gaze is not confined to the narrow sphere of human interests but extends far beyond it to the limitless field of the Infinite. Only it wants the Infinite to maintain a living touch with man. Man is not a forsaken creature; God has honoured him by maintaining constant contact with him.

The core of Tagore's religion is a sense of organic unity of man with the universe. It is the realization of an all-pervading personality in the universe answering to the personality of man. He found inspiration in the songs of the Vaishnava poets who "sang of a love that ever flows through numerous obstacles between man and Man the Divine, the eternal relation which has the relationship of mutual dependence for a fulfilment that needs perfect union of individuals and the Individual".

His religion, he confessed, was "a poet's religion". All that he felt about it was from vision, not from knowledge. This gave him an advantage, he thought, which those who relied upon logic and reason did not possess. For it is the man of inner sense who alone can realize the inner unity manifesting itself through all differences. The man of reason and logic, on the contrary, stumbles at every step over individual objects and individual facts. He has no dissolvent by which the separateness of these can be merged in the unity of a greater whole. For him, therefore, facts are final, and he does not care for their hidden meanings.

So far Tagore went with the man of inner vision. But

religion with him was not only a matter of vision, but also of the heart. The man of the heart unlocks his heart to the Infinite Heart of the Man Divine. The pulsations of the latter he feels in the pulsations of his own heart. Tagore quoted a number of sayings of the wandering minstrels of Bengal, called Bâüls, who had such a heart-to-heart communion with the Man Divine. One such minstrel sang: "Man seeks the man in me and I loose myself and run out". Ravidas, a poet-singer of mediaeval India, sang: "Thou seest me, O Divine Man (*Narahari*), and I see thee, and our love becomes mutual". God, therefore, appeared to all these mystics as "the Man of my heart". The essence of this realization is "the expansion of our consciousness in a great reality of Man to which we belong".

The result of this survey of the essential nature of religion he summed up as follows: "Science may include in its field of knowledge the starry world and the world beyond it; philosophy may try to find some universal principle which is at the root of all things, but religion inevitably concentrates itself on humanity, which illumines our reason, inspires our wisdom, stimulates our love, claims our intelligent service".

He was proud to admit that this was anthropomorphism, and said that man's religion could not but be anthropomorphic. He looked upon man as the crown of the whole process of evolution.

This may be all true, but the question is: Cannot man himself evolve into something higher? Why should we think that man, as he is, represents all that he ever can be? And if he can become something different from what he is, why should not his religion also take this into account? Why should its gaze be confined to him, when he himself is only a passing phase? If the destiny of man is to be more than man, religion cannot be content with looking at the world from his point of view.

#### (d) RELIGION OF THE SUPERMAN

In other words, the standpoint of religion must be, not the standpoint of man, but that of the Superman. This is the great truth proclaimed by Sri Aurobindo. Not man as he is, but man as he shall be, as he is destined to be, sets the standard for religion.

The limitations of the types of religion we have just

<sup>\*</sup> *Religion of Man*, pp. 113-14.



examined, may all be attributed to this one cause, the failure to perceive that *man is not the goal of evolution*. The anxiety which the religion of humanity shows to preserve in a somewhat improved form the existing institutions of man, for instance, is due to its failure to grasp that these institutions may not be the last thing in the scheme of world-evolution. Even its principle of the universal brotherhood of man may have to be transformed, as we shall presently see, in the light of the higher destiny of man.

So, too, individual realization is not enough. The history of the world has already shown this. There have been in every age and in every country men who have attained individual realization, and through it, individual emancipation, but their attaining individual salvation has not improved the general condition of the world. The world is just where it is, in spite of their obtaining individual realization. From the point of view of world-progress, therefore, a religion whose outlook is confined to individual realization, no matter how satisfying it may be to the individuals concerned, must be pronounced a failure. Religion must have a cosmic outlook ; it is faith in the *cosmic* realization of values. Let me explain. Religion does not believe in a static condition of the universe. If it did, it would not be the dynamic element in the spiritual life that it is. It believes in the progress of the world—a progress which is not limited by any conditions, but is truly endless. The world at present has not reached the perfection which is its due. There are possibilities of its further improvement which are simply unlimited. There are values which are still unrealized in it, but which it is its destiny to realize. The goal of evolution is not individual realization but cosmic realization, that is to say, the realization of higher and higher values in the universe, leading to a higher and higher status of it.

The religion of the Superman is a prophecy of a new heaven and a new earth. It does *not* say to man, "Lo, you are in a gross, stupid, unkind world. The physical universe which surrounds you is the field of blind, unconscious force. Even your own little world, the world of your neighbours, friends and relations is a world of gross stupidity and darkness. You can expect nothing but opposition and obstruction from your physical as well as your social environment at every step in your march towards higher and higher realization. In spite of all this opposition, however, you will succeed, provided you can detach yourself thoroughly from the world and have a sufficiently intense

hankering after realization". But it says to him, "Behold, a new heaven and a new earth is coming. A new age, a *Satyayuga*, is about to dawn. This earth will not be the stupid and blind earth that it is to-day. This atmosphere will not be the dense atmosphere that you breathe to-day. Your society, the society of your friends and relations and fellow-beings, will not be the dull and callous and unkind society that you see to-day. All this is going to change. A new physical universe, not controlled by unconscious forces, but illumined by the light of a Superior Light, is about to emerge, and a new society, a society of gnostic beings, is going to make its appearance, and you will find yourself, not obstructed and opposed, but encouraged and helped at every step in your march towards higher realization. In fact, you will march hand-in-hand with your fellows, the gnostic beings, aided by a new and transformed material universe, towards heights undreamt-of before".

This is the message of the religion of the Superman, as proclaimed by Sri Aurobindo. Its two main components are: (1) that religion is religion of the Superman, and not of Man, (2) that it visualizes a cosmic, and not merely an individual realization. They completely change the outlook of religion. The religion of the Superman differs fundamentally from the religion of man, just as the latter differs fundamentally from physical religion. It does not value very highly those things which man wants to cling to, such as social, economic and political institutions.

It makes a transvaluation of values—a complete overhauling and transformation of human values. It does more than this, for it brings into view certain values of which man at present has no consciousness. It would be idle to pretend to know and grasp all the values that will reveal themselves to the consciousness of the Superman. We at the human level can at best faintly guess the values that will dawn upon such a consciousness. We are too prone to suppose that all our cherished dreams will be realized, and that too, as we precisely wish them to be realized, in that higher life. In this we are sure to be disappointed.

One great thing which the famous English thinker Bradley has taught us is that we must not suppose all our dear and cherished things to remain just as they are, when seen in the light of a higher principle. If we seek the guidance of the Absolute, we must be prepared to give up many of them and see them transformed, some into mere skeletons, others even into ghosts. Those dear things without which we cannot conceive

life to be possible, would, when viewed in the light of the Absolute, simply melt away, as did the great pretensions of learning of Nārada when subjected to the searching examination of his instructor, Sanatkumāra. Even some of the values which appear to us most essential, may, when viewed in relation to the Absolute, lose their importance.

This is why Sri Aurobindo says that ethics is only a passing phase of evolution. His object is not to underrate the value of ethics. Ethics undoubtedly holds a very important place in the organization of human society. But human society as it exists at present is not the last word of evolution. It is bound to undergo a radical transformation when evolution jumps to its next higher stage. When this takes place, the values of morality will lose the importance which they possess at present. Family relations, the relations between capital and labour, the State and the individual, etc., will all undergo a fundamental change when man will experience a radical change in his nature due to the emergence of a higher principle in him. It is not possible, therefore, to look upon any of these as ultimate values.

Take, again, the great principle of humanism, the Universal Brotherhood of Man. Why should we think that in the higher life which is destined to be ours, this principle will be realized as we wish it to be done? Do we not see that in spite of its spectacular grandeur, there is narrowness and prejudice at the bottom of it? Why should we suppose that man will for ever lead a separate life from the rest of creation? Why should we always hate the lower animals? Why should we think it impossible to have any brotherhood with them? And then the physical universe? Must we suppose that it will for ever remain alien to us? Can we not feel any fellowship with it? Should we always consider ourselves to be superior to it and should we always consider it to be our duty to curb and control it? Should it remain the highest ambition of man to be master of the physical universe and use it for his ends? The growth of science has undoubtedly given man unlimited opportunities for realizing this ambition, but nevertheless, is this ambition one which it is the duty of man always to cherish? Are those eternal words of wisdom of our sages, सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म, तत्त्वमसि, सोऽहमस्मि mere phrases? Is there no inner ballast of fundamental, vital truth behind these great words? Is that great ideal of a fundamental organic unity of the whole universe, physical, vital, mental, a mere idle fancy? Are these great sayings mere lugubriousness of mentally unbalanced, soma-intoxicated dreamers?

If we think so, I have nothing to say except that we should refrain from mourning the sad state in which religion finds herself to-day, and should give up for ever all hope of raising her to her former glorious position. If all that we expect from religion is that she should maintain all the goody, goody ideas of our respectable morality, then the sooner we cease to talk of reviving and reforming religion, the better it will be for us and for religion.

It may be said that the brotherhood of the whole universe or man's organic unity with the whole creation is too thin and dilute a conception to serve as a foundation for religion. I admit that it is so. But this is precisely what we have got to change. Why is this conception so thin and dilute? Is it not because we are incapable of grasping as a concrete reality the fundamental organic unity of the whole creation? And why so? *Because we look at everything through the spectacles of mind.* And mind is only capable of comprehending such a unity as a mere abstraction and not as a concrete reality. This incapacity is something inherent in the very nature of mind, and mind can no more get rid of it than the leopard can change its skin. All constructions of mind have this fundamental weakness about them, that they make abstractions of all principles. All mental principles have this essential defect that they are unsubstantial masses, floating in mid-air, without being rooted in the soil of concrete reality. And that is why one breath of wind takes them to one abstraction, as another carries them to another. To move from one abstraction to another, from eternity to eternity—this is the fate of mind.

No doubt a very sad fate. But this is not the fate of man. And this is the glorious message which the religion of the Superman gives us. Its first and most essential teaching is that mind is not the last stage of evolution, but that mind must consummate itself in something higher than mind. This 'something higher than mind' is what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind. Evolution is bound to rise to the stage of the Supermind. The Supermind is bound to descend into the process of evolution and give it a new push. And when this happens, principles will no longer remain frothy abstractions, but will become living, concrete realities. This principle, for instance, which we were discussing, the principle of the organic unity of the whole creation, will then become charged with concrete reality. It will no longer remain thin as it now is, but will be clothed in the flesh and blood of a living reality. That is why I said, "We

have got to change all this". Under the religion of the Superman the organic unity of the universe will be one of the most living and dynamic realities. The so-called thinness, therefore, of this vital principle is only a passing phase, and will disappear with the disappearance of the rule of mind and the emergence of the Supermind.

We thus see that the principle of the Universal Brotherhood of Man will be transformed into that of the organic unity of the whole universe, when the Supermind will descend into the process of evolution. Similarly, the principles of nationalism and internationalism will lose all their distinguishing characteristics and be merged in a higher principle of unity. Bergson is right when he says that nationalism and internationalism differ not in degree, but in kind. Bergson, however, is wrong when he thinks that this difference is one between closed and open morality, that is, between institutional morality and the morality of inner realization. Inner or individual realization is not competent to give a full view of internationalism. This can only be obtained through cosmic realization, that is to say, when not only the individual, but the whole world receives a new light and reaches a higher stage of its evolution. The full realization of internationalism is not possible at the human level; man, so long as he is merely man, will always have his quarrels with his fellow-men in one form or another. This is why, in spite of the best efforts of so many philosophers and other ardent souls who have dedicated their lives to it, internationalism is still as far off as ever. It must wait till the emergence of a higher principle leading to a radical cosmic transformation. But when this consummation takes place—and here is the most wonderful part of the whole process—internationalism itself will be transformed into something higher, for instance, into a principle of universal cosmic unity.

This is true also of the other offshoot of internationalism, namely, peace and goodwill among men. This also is not capable of realization at the human stage. Wars will continue to disfigure our civilization, so long as it remains only human. It is impossible to formulate any scheme by which we can hope permanently to get rid of war, so long as world-evolution remains where it is, that is, so long as it continues to be dominated by mind. For this imposes certain fundamental limitations of outlook, which preclude the possibility of our taking a truly broad view of things, which alone can make war an impossibility.

If this is pessimism, then it is pessimism to say that fire

burns. Fire is fire, and so long as it continues to be fire, it must burn. So also man is man, and so long as he continues to be man, there is no escape for him from war. But man is not destined to remain for ever mere man. *He has a higher destiny, and that is to become more than man, to become Superman.*

This is the great optimistic note of Sri Aurobindo's religion and philosophy. It emphatically declares that there is bound to come a time when man will be free from his present limitations and will pass into the state of Superman. There is no possibility of doubt about this. It asserts this as an absolute certainty. Where it speaks hesitatingly or haltingly is about the possibility of eliminating war under the present conditions of human society. But this hesitation means nothing more than that imperfection is imperfection. That there are certain inherent weaknesses in man, even the greatest champion of humanism cannot deny. That on account of these weaknesses war cannot be completely eliminated, is also what it is impossible to deny.

Indeed, it is difficult to find a greater optimist than Sri Aurobindo. He gives us a picture of a future state of evolution, where not only will war become absolutely unthinkable, but a spirit of harmony and order will descend even to the lower order of creation. For, as he says<sup>8</sup>, "the supramental gnostic being . . . would not only found all his living on an intimate sense and effective realization of harmonic unity in his own inner and outer life or group life, but would create a harmonic unity also with the still surviving mental world, even if that world remained altogether a world of Ignorance. For the gnostic consciousness in him would perceive and bring out the evolving truth and principle of harmony hidden in the formations of the Ignorance ; it would be natural to his sense of integrality and it would be within his power to link them in a true order with his own gnostic principle and the evolved truth and harmony of his own greater life-creation".

As a result of this penetration of the Supramental consciousness into the lower forms of creation, there will be established a greater unity between the higher and the lower forms than exists to-day. The result will be a greater solidarity between individual and individual, leading to a greater organic unity. This appears clearly from the following sketch<sup>9</sup> of the change brought about in the relation of the individual to other individuals and

<sup>8</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 1033.

to life and matter: "For the gnostic being would be in unison and communion with the Consciousness-Force that is at the root of everything: his vision and his will would be the channel of the supramental Real-Idea, the self-effective Truth-Force; his action would be a free manifestation of the power and workings of the root Force of existence, the force of an all-determining conscious spirit whose formulations of consciousness work out inevitably in mind, life and matter. Acting in the light and power of the supramental knowledge, the evolving gnostic being would be more and more master of himself, master of the forces of consciousness, master of the energies of Nature, master of his instrumentation of life and matter . . . A new power and powers of consciousness would then be an inevitable consequence of an evolution of Consciousness-Force passing beyond mind to a superior cognitive and dynamic principle. In their essential nature these new powers must have the character of a control of mind over life and matter, of the conscious life-will and life-force over matter, of the spirit over mind, life and matter; they would have the character also of a breaking down of the barriers between soul and soul, mind and mind, life and life: such a change would be indispensable for the instrumentation of the gnostic life. For a total gnostic or divine living would include not only the individual life of the being but the life of others made one with the individual in a common uniting consciousness"<sup>9</sup>.

The characteristics of this higher social unity Sri Aurobindo further describes as follows: "There must be an inner and direct mutual knowledge, based upon a consciousness of oneness and identity, a consciousness of each other's being, thought, feeling, inner and outer movements, a conscious communication of mind with mind, of heart with heart, a conscious impact of life upon life, a conscious interchange of forces of being with forces of being; in any absence or deficiency of these powers and their intimate light there could not be a real and complete unity or a real and complete natural fitting of each individual's being, thought, feeling, inner and outer movements with those of the individuals around him. A growing basis and structure of conscious unanimism, we might say, would be the character of this more evolved life."<sup>10</sup>

There is great chaos, says Sri Aurobindo, in men's ideas about the relative values of society and the individual, some

<sup>9</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, pp. 1138-40.

<sup>10</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 1140.

maintaining that society exists for the individual, and others holding just the opposite view. What should be the proper attitude of religion towards this question? There is no doubt that the individual is the key to the whole process of evolution. He is the carrier of values, and it is by the level which he attains that the stage of evolution is to be determined. Nevertheless, it is necessary to understand wherein lies his value as an individual. Briefly it may be said that his value lies in the extent to which he is able to express in himself the Reality that seeks expression through him. But this self-expression of the Reality in the individual has infinite grades. The individual began as infra-human and will end as supra-human. "For", says Sri Aurobindo, "our humanity is not the whole of the Reality or its best possible self-formation or self-expression—the Reality has assumed before man existed an infrahuman formation and self-creation and can assume after him or in him a supra-human formation and self-creation"<sup>11</sup>. The growth of the individual has indeed no limit ; as he can surpass humanity, so can he surpass the universe. "The universe finds itself through him even as he finds himself in the universe, . . . since he can surpass it and enter into something in himself and in it and beyond it that is absolute".<sup>12</sup>

It is clear from this that the individual does not owe any allegiance either to the community or humanity, but solely to the Reality, that is, to God. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, "his allegiance must be to the Truth, the Self, the Spirit, the Divine which is in him and in all".

Does this mean, however, that the future religion must go back to individualism? The answer is both 'Yes' and 'No'. It is 'Yes' in the sense that the ultimate carrier of value is undoubtedly the individual, and if the individual is crushed by the social machinery, then the mainspring of evolution will disappear and the evolutionary process will come to a standstill. It is indeed at such times that, as the Gita says, the need of an *Avatāra* arises, for it is only an *Avatāra* that can help the world-evolution to tide over such a crisis. But it should be noted that the *Avatāra* himself is only a Higher Individual who releases the forces which suffered a temporary check due to the crushing of individuality by a lifeless, soulless machinery, whether the machinery is that of laws which have lost all their inner spiritual content and have become mere dead husks, or whether it is that

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1153.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1153.



of the arbitrary dictates of an autocrat who rules by sheer physical force.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that the evolutionary process can only continue so long as there is continuous growth of the individual. Evolution, in fact, may be defined from one point of view as a growth from a lower to a higher individual. In inorganic evolution we have to deal with the lowest type of individual. In organic evolution we have to deal with a higher type ; in mind, with a still higher. And then when evolution crosses the boundaries of ignorance and passes into the domain of knowledge, it comes across for the first time the true individual.

And what does it find there? Does it find an individual who is in eternal conflict with society? Just the reverse. The higher we ascend in the scale of individuality, the less will be the conflict between the individual and society. And that is why we have to say 'No' to the question: Does the future religion mean going back to individualism? Individualism, as we understand it, does not really favour the growth of a higher type of individual. The individual it contemplates is one who seeks his economic, social and political advantage, regardless of the interests of others, and often in opposition to them. It wants to give such an individual unlimited opportunities for self-aggrandisement, subject only to such limitations as will ensure for others also similar opportunities. Individualism of this type stands self-condemned. Future religion can have nothing to do with it. The individual whose growth it looks upon as a fundamental need of evolution is a very different individual from that contemplated by individualism. For one thing, he does not consider his interests to clash with those of others. Rather he does not consider anything good for him which is not good for others.

A society of such individuals is very different from any society that we know of. In all kinds of society of which we have any knowledge, an individual *qua* individual does not feel his identity with other individuals. Through education and through social pressure, he is made to realize some sort of common bond with his fellow-individuals. But this realization is never complete ; the common bond breaks at the most crucial moments, and a constant need is felt of some external authority to bring about by force some sort of outward union. There is thus constant friction between individual and individual, and between the individual and society.

In the society envisaged by the religion of the future, the gnostic society, as it may be called, such a state of things is unthinkable. From the sketch of this society which Sri Aurobindo has given<sup>11</sup>, it is perfectly clear that the very possibility of any clash between individuals is absolutely unthinkable. "One in self with all", he says, "the supramental being will seek the delight of self-manifestation of the Spirit in himself, but equally the delight of the Divine in all, he will have the cosmic joy and will be a power for bringing the bliss of the spirit, the joy of being to others ; for their joy will be part of his own joy of existence. To be occupied with the good of all beings, to make the joy and grief of others one's own has been described as a sign of the liberated and fulfilled spiritual man. The supramental being will have no need for that of an altruistic self-effacement, since this occupation will be intimate to his self-fulfilment, the fulfilment of the One in all, and there will be no contradiction or strife between his own good and the good of others: nor will he have any need to acquire a universal sympathy by subjecting himself to the joys and griefs of creatures in the Ignorance ; his cosmic sympathy will be part of his inborn truth of being and not dependent on a personal participation in the lesser joy and suffering ; it will transcend what it embraces and in that transcendence will be its power. His feeling of universality, his action of universality will be always a spontaneous state and natural movement, an automatic expression of the Truth, an act of the joy of the spirit's self-existence".

An act of the joy of the spirit's self-existence! This is, in fact, the transformation which occurs when Man passes into Superman. The conscious effort which in the human stage is required to make man seek the good of others is changed into a pure joy of being, an undiluted *ānanda*, when the transition from Man to Superman takes place. This transition may be described briefly as one from duty to *ānanda*. Kant is perfectly right when he says that the categorical imperative or the unconditional law of duty can alone make us men. But he is wrong in thinking that no higher state can be conceived than what is pictured in the notion of unconditional obedience to the moral law. No matter how essential this notion may be at the human stage of evolution, it becomes an anachronism when the boundary is crossed which separates man from the superman. Then duty becomes a pure *ānanda*, obedience to the moral law is then transformed into a sheer joy of existence.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 1041.

For the sheer joy of existence the Superman links himself with others, nay, with the whole of creation. All sense of effort vanishes from him, all consciousness of duty. Effort and duty can have place only when the normal consciousness is a consciousness of difference and a sense of identity is only attained by suppressing this consciousness by a violent exertion. But where the normal consciousness is one of profound identity with the whole universe, how can there be any room for effort and duty? How can there be also any room for sorrow or delusion, for these are the outcome of a sense of division:

तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥

These are some of the main features of the religion of the Superman, the religion of the future, as I shall now call it, for it fulfils all the conditions I have already mentioned, which the religion of the future must satisfy, inasmuch as it takes up into itself and brings into perfection the values of the other types of religion, at the same time adding some new values of which they were not conscious. It is not a compromise between the different ideals of religion as they are in vogue to-day, but it will chalk out a new path, guided by the new consciousness that will emerge when world-evolution will take its next most momentous leap forward. It will be neither humanism, nor a religion of mysticism, nor a religion of man; nor will it be individualistic or socialistic or nationalistic or internationalistic, for these terms, as we have seen, have reference to the present world-conditions and will lose all their meaning when these conditions undergo a radical change.

What, however, will be the immediate future of religion? That depends upon how far religion understands her mission, which is neither to quarrel with science about matters of fact, nor to exhibit an inordinate desire to be in her good books. Why should religion be so anxious to placate science? The world neither wants scientific religion nor religious science, but it wants religion pure and simple. Religion must have something of her own to proclaim. And she must have the courage to proclaim it, without caring whether science accepts it or not. If history has taught us anything, it is this, that if you want to win the respect of the world, you must proclaim your views fearlessly. This is as true in the sphere of religion as in other spheres. Religion has suffered enormously in world-estimation by reason of her being tied to the apron-strings of the dogmatic theories of the Church in the Middle Ages, and in the present

age by reason of her morbid anxiety to seek the good opinion of science. If she is to succeed, she must get rid of her attitude of subservience and boldly proclaim what she thinks and what she feels. She has an assured position in the world-order as the repository of faith—faith in the realization of values—and nothing can dislodge her from her position, neither science nor anything else, unless she chooses to dislodge herself.

# Sri Aurobindo as a Literary Artist

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There are people who read Sri Aurobindo for the mystery and glamour surrounding his terrestrial career, more exclusive people who see in him the promise—nay, the reality—of the Superman and read him as the propounder of integral yoga, others who remember him mainly as the apostle of virile nationalism and read him as the living soul of renascent India, and there are some others still to whom he is primarily a literary artist and hence read him merely to lose themselves in the luminous radiances of his poetry or in the many enchanting expanses of his weighty prose works. It is the last named aspect of a many-faceted achievement that is the subject of this diffident attempt at appraisal.

## I

An artist is ever one who strives to induce form into seemingly formless matter, who wrestles with the raw-stuff of reality to explore its significances and exhibit them to the world ; he is thus something of an explorer and creator in his own sovereign right. The potter handles only foul, frail clay, but his exertions end in the production of a beautiful and useful article ; the carpenter slaves at his task, sawing and splitting huge masses of timber, but he ends by creating a chair or a chandelier or a chariot ; the weaver and the basket-maker, the master-builder of churches and bridges and mosques and temples, the music-makers who waft the human soul to the seventh heaven of felicity, the painter and the poet whose inspired creations offer the balm of incommensurable hope to ailing humanity, they are artists all, explorers of reality and creators of beauty which at the same time that it is beautiful is also purposive.

The distinction that is often elaborated between the 'mechanical' arts on the one hand and the 'fine' arts on the other does not really touch the root of the matter. It is not as though

the former are wholly utilitarian and the latter are utter superfluities in life. So long as there is no difference in their capacity, why does one prefer a beautiful to an ugly basket? Beauty may have, strictly speaking, no 'use' for us, but it is of much 'value' to those who can respond to it—and where is the man with a soul so dead that he has never felt his sensibilities quicken in the presence of beauty? On the other hand, the so-called 'fine' arts—music, painting, sculpture, architecture and poetry—are not mere luxuries, delectable toys in one's exclusive Ivory Tower, but rather the oxygen whose inhalation helps the human soul to realize, at auspicious moments, that

A life of intensities wide, immune  
Floats behind the earth and her life-fret,  
A magic of realms mastered by spell and rune,  
Grandiose, blissful, coloured, increate.<sup>1</sup>

Art can be neither wholly utilitarian (in its lesser, material sense) nor can it be pursued or professed or practised in an absolute vacuum. It is as meaningless to cry down an artisan because he produces marketable chairs and baskets as it is to extol a Bright Young Thing that loudly proclaims the heresy that Art is ever for Art's sake alone. Even the basket-maker is an artist, for he too is conscious of beauty, and is able to realize it here and now; and even the most gifted of poets is something of an artisan, for he too has laboriously to learn to master his material by using the delicate tools of his own forging. All products of artistic activity must thus possess value in our eyes; we go to them, we cherish them, because they are useful to us in one way or another, because they both serve us and enlighten us, because they make life livable and enjoyable in its different planes and diverse manifestations.

While all the arts are no doubt reared on a common base, they nevertheless differ from one another in their possibilities and in their completed development. It is, in the main, a question of lesser or greater comprehension, and this, again, is largely determined by the nature of the medium in each particular instance; the more intractable the medium is, the less scope has the artist to achieve a totality of comprehension. In general terms, every artist aims at storming the citadel of Reality and revealing its purposive core and manifold significances; he aims—to vary the metaphor—at bridging the seeming chasm that divides the real from the ideal, Time from Eternity, the human

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Poems and Plays*, II, p. 282.

from the Divine ; he aims at portraying infinity in a grain of sand, ineffable beauty in a few dots and dashes, the music of the spheres in a song or a lyric.

## II

The aim is the same—but the media vary, and the different arts offer, in consequence, an interesting study in secondary differentiation. Architect or sculptor or painter or musician or poet, the artist would glimpse Infinity and attempt to realize it in terms of his medium—stone, marble, palette, sound, symbol, as the case may be. The architect can really give his visions a local—almost a material—habitation and a name ; the finished structure is there before us, it immediately makes an assault upon our emotions and imaginations. But the medium at the disposal of the architect is essentially intractable ; it can be made to convey only a limited number of ideas. The grandeur of a Gopura or of a Gothic church or of a Taj bathed in moonlight is certain to transport the human soul from its prosaic habitation on the earth ; but the experience comes in a flood, overwhelms us at once, and anon leaves us behind amidst the shallows and miseries of our humdrum occupations. The nuances, curves, and gradations that make life a rich and varied store of significance, the embracing fluidities of love and play and laughter, these cannot come within the purview of architecture, nor yet that of sculpture—for, although human and divine features may be portrayed by a sculptor, he can never reproduce the dynamics of passion, the fluctuations in the fever and the fret that agitate the perennially human in us all ; although wonders have been achieved with masses of stone and blocks of marble or brass, a great deal must yet always elude the grasp of the architect and the sculptor.

The painter is better placed in respect of his medium than are the architect and the sculptor. Colours are fluid things, they are fascinating and intriguing things ; you can choose your colours, you can mix them in any way you please, and you can load the canvas less or more with the many colours at your disposal. Since a two-dimensional canvas has to do duty for a three-dimensional material world and a multi-dimensional spiritual world, the painter has to leave much to illusion. Less strictly realized in terms of matter, painting is none the less more suggestive than is either sculpture or architecture ; movement, the dynamics of action, variety, multiplicity, all these can

be subtly insinuated by the accomplished painter. In other words, painting is a more inclusive—more variously comprehending-art than are architecture and sculpture, which, in their turn, are more inclusive and vitally comprehensive than are merely mechanical arts like pottery or carpentry or basket-making.

Music and poetry, the most ethereal of the arts, are also the most inclusive among them. The musician's medium is sound,—and music is therefore called an art of the ear in contrast to painting, sculpture and architecture, which are called arts of the eye. Now sounds are deceptively fluid and they can be made to signify almost the entire gamut of human emotions, passions, and aspirations. The musician is thus in a position to convey the very rhythm of life in its different altitudes ; he can make the stream of sound mirror the darkling current of human life ; and music can accurately reiterate life's significances and emphasize their splendid unity.

Tenuous, indeed, is the musician's medium, but even sound is more concrete than the medium at the disposal of a literary artist. Poets and prose writers are alike compelled to use words—words only, words alone—in the practice of their art. But what are words! When words are printed, they no doubt catch the eye, but words were not always printed or even written ; when words are spoken, they are doubtless heard by the human ear, but words are not always spoken. What is the true content of a word, then? It has a particular look on the printed page, it conveys a particular sound to the ear, it communicates something akin to an idea to the mind ; but a word is more than what it looks and what it sounds and what it seems to mean ; it is a symbol, it is a wave that floats in the ocean of Eternity, sometimes carrying a whisper from God to man or a prayer from man to God. In logical phraseology we might say that a word has both a definite denotation and an unknown, almost limitless connotation ; we might say that a word has both a semantic import and a phonetic significance ; but we cannot ever hope to dispossess words of their potency, their mystery and their magic.

A literary artist has greater potentialities of expression, not because as an artist he has aims other than those that inspire the musician or the painter or the sculptor or the architect, but because his medium is capable of infinite variation, it is the most ethereal and comprehensive medium of all. A block of wayside stone may appear to be a crude and useless thing ; but the gifted



sculptor sees the form implicit in it, chisels away the superfluous masses, and lo and behold, a beautiful image results from his exertions! It is not as if he has created the image—he has only released it from its amorphous prison-house and allowed it to pursue its career of beauty and breathe the air of freedom. In like manner, stray words in the Dictionary, like so many wayside stones, may appear prosaic and harsh and crude; but the magic touch of the literary artist will kindle them into a flame of beauty, that radiates “thoughts that wander through eternity”. The words that a literary artist uses are in physical appearance just like the words in a Dictionary; but they are not so to be understood or apprehended; a poet’s words are not printed bundles of letters, nor are they a grouping of pleasure-giving sounds; while poetry does appeal to the ear and although it is now-a-days preserved in print, the poetic word ever attempts to reach the inward ear, to sink into the human soul and enrich it; the poetic word is the least material of all media and is akin rather to a winged squadron of the spirit that annihilates space and time and links the human soul with infinity and eternity.

### III

Sri Aurobindo, being a literary artist, has perforce to use words as the medium of his expression. If his father had sent him, not to the Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling and thence to London and to Cambridge, but to native schools and colleges in Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo might have early familiarized himself with his mother tongue and become in the fulness of time another Bankim Chandra or Rabindranath, wielding with power and grace the most dynamic of modern Indian languages. But that was not to be. English became for all practical purposes Sri Aurobindo’s mother tongue and he acquired in an incredibly short time an astonishing mastery over this difficult language. A profound knowledge of Greek and Latin and a fair acquaintance with French, Italian and German helped him to study the language and the literature of the English people both in their origins and in their present European setting. Back in India at long last, Sri Aurobindo started reading Sanskrit and Bengali, and quickly grew proficient in both—but English remained his mother tongue; he loved Sanskrit and Bengali and mastered them much as a Sir William Jones loved Sanskrit and studied

it. Be that as it may, Sri Aurobindo was now, at the age of twenty-five, a master of many languages and knowledges, and a gifted writer in English who found it as easy and natural to turn his thoughts into limpid verse as to give them the "other harmony of prose".

In the course of a long and varied career, Sri Aurobindo has been writing incessantly; writing prose and verse; letters, journalistic essays, reviews, exhortations, critical and philosophical expositions, commentaries and treatises, all in prose; and in verse, epigrams, translations, adaptations, lyrics, narrative poems, dramas, and, in recent years, a set of remarkable exhibits in futurist poetry. In result, Sri Aurobindo produces in one the impression that he is a born lord of language; he scatters words about, at once with precision and with liberality; he is both *voluble in appearance and compact in effect*; he is so consummate a literary artist that his art ever covers up the traces of its toils, leaving only the well-cut diamond behind.

When we refer to an artist's toils, we do not necessarily mean that the pursuit of art is but a travail of double, double, toil and trouble. Creative composition is almost always a matter of taking considerable—if not infinite—pains; but neither should pleasure be ruled out altogether; indeed, the pains of labour admitted, is there not also a fury of pleasure as well in the throes of parturition? Moreover, once an artist has gone through a severe discipline in works, artistic activity becomes almost second nature to him and he seems to paint or to sing or to write easily, effortlessly and as it were involuntarily. How much more true is it in the life of a true yogi, who has undergone the severest disciplines in the vital, mental and spiritual planes, and who has transformed them all into engines of purposeful activity dedicated to the Life Divine? Yoga is indeed skill in works—and there is nothing surprising in a yogi wielding the instrument of language with ease, skill, dexterity, and unfailing success.

Read Sri Aurobindo's letters—there are, perhaps, several thousands of them—and they all hum and sparkle and whisper, at once a voice near one's ear and a voice from above; they are neither poems, nor rhetorical pieces of prose, but they reproduce rather the delicate rhythms of common speech; they are best described as verbal curtains that shut us in—and then we almost decipher the very features and recognize the unique modula-

tions of the voice of the remarkable writer of these letters. Quotation is difficult, but this one will do for a specimen:

"Dilip,

I cannot say that I follow very well the logic of your doubts. How does a noble and selfless friend suffering in a prison-hospital invalidate the hope of yoga? There are many dismal spectacles in the world, but that is after all the very reason why yoga has to be done. If the world were all happy and beautiful and ideal, who would want to change it or find it necessary to bring down a higher consciousness into the earthly Mind and Matter? Your other argument is that the work of the yoga itself is not easy—not a happy canter to the goal. Of course it isn't, because the world and human nature are what they are. I never said it was easy or that there were not obstinate difficulties in the way of the endeavour.

Again I do not understand your point about raising up a new race by my going on writing trivial letters ten hours a day. Of course not—nor by writing important letters either; even if I were to spend my time writing fine poems it would not build up a new race. Each activity is important in its own place: an electron or a molecule or a grain may be small things in themselves, but in their place they are indispensable to the building up of a world; it cannot be made up only of mountains and sunsets and streamings of the aurora borealis—though these have their place there. All depends on the force behind these things and the purpose in their action—and that is known to the Cosmic Spirit which is at work; and It works, I may add, not by the mind or according to human standards but by a greater consciousness which, starting from an electron, can build up a world and, using a tangle of ganglia, can make them the base here for the work of the Mind and Spirit in Matter, produce a Ramakrishna, a Napoleon, a Shakespeare . . ."<sup>1</sup> The phrasing is impeccable, and even the two unusual words 'canter' and 'ganglia' but enrich the passage; the rhythms are akin to those of subdued conversational speech and play on one's tongue with disarming familiarity. One can picture to oneself this imaginary scene—the *chela* agitatedly putting forward one animadversion after another, the *guru* patiently and almost smilingly meeting them, explaining, arguing, persuading. Only a casual letter—a "trivial" letter!—but it reveals the writer, explains the core of his faith, and, incidentally, illustrates his prose art.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Dilip Kumar Roy's *Tithankar*.

## IV

Sri Aurobindo's more deliberate compositions in prose are distinguished by the same qualities of quiet assurance, classical phrasing, and appropriateness to the theme and the mood and the occasion. You may tackle any of his prose 'tracts for the times' or journalistic effusions or massive treatises—there is no faltering at the exordium, no thinness in the structure of the argument, no weakness in the peroration. Works like *The Life Divine*, *The Future Poetry*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Ideal of Human Unity* are mighty edifices, boldly conceived and executed with both imagination and a minute particularity. Sri Aurobindo has never felt it beneath his notice to attend to details ; a true artist, he has always realized that even seeming trifles have their own appointed place in the fulness of the final achievement. Although the above sequences were originally written under the peculiar exigencies of periodical publication, they nevertheless preserve form and unity of impression, and claim and secure for Sri Aurobindo a place among the great modern masters of English prose.

It is, perhaps, convenient as it is also necessary to study in particular the two monumental works, *Essays on the Gita* and *The Life Divine*, because these have gone through a process of revision since their publication in the *Arya* and are now easily accessible in book form. The *Essays* are in intention exegetical ; the *Gita* is paraphrased, often verse by verse ; Lord Krishna's uttered and unuttered thoughts are sifted, arranged, illustrated, expanded ; seemingly and endlessly repetitive, the *Essays* are seen in the end to be somehow endowed with a marvellous compactness and unity of its own. What has happened is this : while doubtless deriving his primary inspiration from the Song Celestial, Sri Aurobindo has created out of it his own individual music that enchants and exhilarates the reader and gradually effects in him a heightened awareness and a keener sensibility.

Likewise, when superficially considered, a work like *The Life Divine* would appear to be a severely—forbiddingly—abstruse treatise, bristling with obscurities and technical terms and hair-splitting differentiations. On the other hand, closer acquaintance with it makes one realize that the whole Himalayan edifice is only a vast prose symphony. There are discussions, no doubt, and in so far as they are discussions they give adequate proof of a virile mental forge at work ; no mere logician developed a thesis or elaborated an argument better than Sri

Aurobindo does in *The Life Divine*. And how admirable—metallic in its hardness and lucid clarity—is a summing-up like this:

“This then is the origin, this the nature, these the boundaries of the Ignorance. Its origin is a limitation of knowledge, its distinctive character a separation of the being from its own integrality and entire reality; its boundaries are determined by this separative development of the consciousness, for it shuts us to our true self and to the true self and whole nature of things and obliges us to live in an apparent surface existence”.<sup>1</sup>

It is, of course, not the story of Jack and Jill going up the hill and fetching water in a pail; it is the crest of an argument that has taken Sri Aurobindo some five hundred pages to elaborate. But it is not spoilt by any avoidable obscurity—on the contrary! Here are some more specimens of such granite phrasing picked at random from these two books:

“Harmony is the natural rule of the spirit, it is the inherent law and spontaneous consequence of unity in multiplicity, of unity in diversity, of a various manifestation of oneness. In a pure and blank unity there could be indeed no place for harmony, for there is nothing to harmonise; in a complete or a governing diversity there must be either discord or a fitting together of differences, a constructed harmony. But in a gnostic unity in multiplicity the harmony would be there as a spontaneous expression of the unity . . . .”<sup>2</sup>

“There is a Reality, a truth of all existence which is greater and more abiding than all its formations and manifestations; to find that truth and Reality and live in it, achieve the most perfect manifestation and formation possible of it, must be the secret of perfection whether of individual or communal being. This Reality is there within each thing and gives to each of its formations, its power of being and value of being”.<sup>3</sup>

“The love of the world spiritualised, changed from a sense-experience to a soul-experience, is founded on the love of God and in that love there is no peril and no shortcoming. Fear and disgust of the world may often be necessary for the recoil from the lower nature, for it

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, II, p. 517.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 1140.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 1152.

is really the fear and disgust of our own ego which reflects itself in the world. But to see God in the world is to fear nothing, it is to embrace all in the being of God ; to see all as the divine is to hate and loathe nothing, but love love God in the world and the world in God".<sup>1</sup>

One comes across many such passages in the body of Sri Aurobindo's prose writings and indeed their balance, their clarity and the vigour of their phrasing are almost as worthy of reverent study as are their logical structure and their close-grained fabric of thought.

## V

Not infrequently, however, Sri Aurobindo's prose art emits unexpected poetic flashes which subtly illumine and transfigure whole sentences and paragraphs. Simile and metaphor trespass upon the domain of cogent prose and language crystallizes into glittering images like these:

"We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future".<sup>2</sup>

"For now the world Being appears to him as the body of God ensouled by the eternal Time-spirit and with its majestic and dreadful voice missions him to the crash of battle".<sup>3</sup>

"It has enormous burning eyes ; it has mouths that gape to devour terrible with many tusks of destruction ; it has faces like the fires of Death and Time".<sup>4</sup>

" . . . Kali with her garland of skulls trampling naked in battle and flecked with the blood of the slaughtered Titans . . ."<sup>5</sup>

"Knowledge waits seated beyond mind and intellectual reasoning, throned in the luminous vast of illimitable self-vision".<sup>6</sup>

Dialectical skill gives place to direct vision, the knife-edge clarity and sharpness of prose dissolve into poetic imagery and symbolism ; and Sri Aurobindo is seen to be poet no less than the wielder of an animated and effective English prose style.

Some of Sri Aurobindo's characteristically epigrammatic or

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on the Gita*, I, p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 179.

<sup>6</sup> *The Life Divine*, I, p. 183.

impassioned bits of prose are contained in his "minor" works—notably in *The Mother*, *Thoughts and Glimpses*, *The Riddle of this World* and *Bases of Yoga*. One is occasionally overwhelmed by a whole shower of epigrams as in:

"What is there new that we have yet to accomplish? Love, for as yet we have only accomplished hatred and self-pleasing ; Knowledge, for as yet we have only accomplished error and perception and conceiving ; Bliss, for as yet we have only accomplished pleasure and pain and indifference ; Power, for as yet we have only accomplished weakness and effort and a defeated victory ; Life, for as yet we have only accomplished birth and growth and dying ; Unity, for as yet we have only accomplished war and association.

In a word, godhead; to remake ourselves in the divine image".<sup>1</sup>

"And what is the end of the whole matter? As if honey could taste itself and all its drops together and all its drops could taste each other and each the whole honeycomb as itself, so should the end be with God and the soul of man and the universe.

Love is the keynote, Joy is the music, Power is the strain, Knowledge, is the performer, the infinite All is the composer and audience. We know only the preliminary discords which are as fierce as the harmony shall be great ; but we shall arrive surely at the fugue of the Divine Beatitudes".<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo's wit and imagination fuse into gem-like images, fascinating, clear-cut and profoundly true:

"God and Nature are like a boy and a girl at play and in love. They hide and run from each other when glimpsed so that they may be sought after and chased and captured".<sup>3</sup>

"What is God after all? An eternal child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden".<sup>4</sup>

How pretty, you'll say—but also how suggestive and how true! The author of *The Life Divine* is not the crusty metaphysician some take him to be—he was a sensitive humanist before ever he dreamed of yoga, and he remains a humanist still.

<sup>1</sup> *Thoughts and Glimpses*, (1923), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Parts of Sri Aurobindo's great little book, *The Mother*, reveal his verbal suppleness at its best. In particular, the sixth section that evokes with intuitive certainty and imaginative precision the manifold "powers" and "personalities" of the Mother—the home-of-all, womb-of-all created things—is surely among the very finest achievements of Sri Aurobindo as an impassioned literary artist. We have to content ourselves with but one significant extract from the book—which, indeed, suffers somewhat in being taken out of its context:

"Wisdom and Force are not the only manifestations of the supreme Mother ; there is a subtler mystery of her nature and without it Wisdom and Force would be incomplete things and without it perfection would not be perfect. Above them is the miracle of eternal beauty, an unseizable secret of divine harmonies, the compelling magic of an irresistible universal charm and attraction that draws and holds things and forces and beings together and obliges them to meet and unite that a hidden Ananda may play from behind the veil and make of them its rhythms and its figures. This is the power of Mahalakshmi and there is no aspect of the Divine Shakti more attractive to the heart of embodied beings. Maheshwari can appear too calm and great and distant for the littleness of earthly nature to approach or contain her, Mahakali too swift and formidable for its weakness to bear ; but all turn with joy and longing to Mahalakshmi. For she throws the spell of the intoxicating sweetness of the Divine: to be close to her is a profound happiness and to feel her within the heart is to make existence a rapture and a marvel ; grace and charm and tenderness flow out from her like light from the sun and wherever she fixes her wonderful gaze or lets fall the loveliness of her smile, the soul is seized and made captive and plunged into the depths of an unfathomable bliss. Magnetic is the touch of her hands and their occult and delicate influence refines mind and life and body and where she presses her feet course miraculous streams of an entrancing Ananda."<sup>1</sup>

Is it a recordation of demonstrable fact or only the subtle elaboration of a poet's fancy? In any case it is a passage that a Sir Thomas Browne or a Walter Pater might have felt proud to have written ; and *The Mother* is full of such beautiful and memorable things.

<sup>1</sup> *The Mother*, pp. 59-62.



Of Sri Aurobindo's prose treatises and essays one might say, borrowing his own words, that "the language . . . the structure of thought, the combination and balancing of ideas belong neither to the temper of a sectarian teacher nor to the spirit of a rigorous analytical dialectics cutting off one angle of the truth to exclude all the others ; but rather there is a wide, undulating, encircling movement of ideas which is the manifestation of a vast synthetic mind and a rich synthetic experience".<sup>1</sup> Here have we, in pointed brevity, both the material for an appraisal of Sri Aurobindo as a literary artist in prose—and a judicious appraisal as well!

## VI

We now turn to Sri Aurobindo's poetry. Whereas in prose the sentence, with its precision and balance and thought-content, is ever the primary meaning-unit, in poetry everything almost hinges on the word. A single word like "idiot" or "incarnadine" or "mandragora" suffuses a whole passage with the true incandescence of poetry. This alone is the criterion that enables us to differentiate a passage of pure poetry from merely competent or meritorious verse. When reading poetry, we are all the time asking ourselves the question: "What made him write like that? But then—how else could it have been said!"

It has been remarked that poetry is "particular words in a particular order"; and this cryptic definition includes all that we generally imply by terms like "poetic diction", "rhythm", "metre", "pattern", and the rest. The poet sees life—his own or other people's—imaginatively: sees it with his whole being, and is one with it for the nonce; and then he re-creates the experience in terms of rhythmical language,—in other words, language that is both speech and song and achieves at one and the same time their dual purposes. There is such a thing as rhythm in prose also and prose sentences too have to be constructed in a particular order; but just as the meaning-unit in poetry is the word, and not the sentence as it is in prose, so also the syllable, and not as in prose the word, is the unit of rhythm in poetry. Poetry at its purest should be able to achieve that triumphant utterance which is

seraphically free  
From taint of personality,

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on the Gita*, I, pp. 8-9.

and is timeless in its content and rhythmical quality. But poetry can no doubt exist in less pure but more familiar categories of meaning-content and rhythmical expression ; it may be seemingly trivial, it may be intellectually, rather than emotionally or imaginatively, sustained ; it may assume the form of epigram, or elegy, or narrative, or drama, or ode, or epic, or lyric, and it may either submit itself to the severe discipline of the couplet or the quatrain or the sonnet, or boldly venture forth into the freer and subtler harmonies of blank verse or sprung rhythm or even free verse.

Sri Aurobindo's poetical output is very considerable in quantity and the published portion alone (which, we are assured, is but a fraction of the total) occupies two sumptuous volumes of nearly seven hundred pages. This represents the work of a period of about fifty years. We have translations from the original Greek, Sanskrit and Bengali ; we have free adaptations,—a good number of them ; we have interesting clusters of lyrics, some secular, others suffused with the fervour of religious faith or the glow of mystical experience ; we have a literary tour-de-force in the drama, *Perseus the Deliverer* ; we have, at one end, poetry inspired by the romantic poets and Victorians, and, at the other end, poetry distinctly futurist in aim and achievement ; in a word, here's indeed "God's plenty", and one can freely participate in its munificence according to one's capacity and inclinations.

The juvenile poems and the early narratives—*Urvashi* and *Love and Death*—are interesting in themselves and are clearly the work of an authentic poet. The lines agreeably trip on one's tongue, the words are carefully—perhaps extra-carefully—chosen, and the "numbers" are rarely displeasing. One comes across many a beautiful line and many a memorable phrase:

A perfect face amid barbarian faces...<sup>1</sup>

A broken prodigal from pleasure's mart...<sup>2</sup>

Titanic on the old stupendous hills...<sup>3</sup>

Bridal outpantings of her broken name...<sup>4</sup>

Alone with woodlands and the voiceless hills...<sup>5</sup>

There are descriptions—Ruru's descent into Pātāla, for instance,—that by the sheer power of the rhythmic word galvanize the very scenes before the reader's eyes ; there are poems like "The

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Poems and Plays*, I, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 103.

Lover's Complaint" and "Love in Sorrow" that are delightful expressions of a vivacious and youthful fancy, if not of a soaring poetic imagination. One thing, however, is certain: these early lyrics and narratives are quite clearly the work of a super-sensitive poet, richly endowed with a head as well as a heart, and both being of imagination all compact. The earlier pieces are by no means poetic masterpieces—but they are a sure prelude to victory in the realms of rhyme. After all, when winter's travails are over, can the laurels of spring be far behind?

## VII

Sri Aurobindo's rendering of Kalidasa's *Vikramorvasie* is comparable to Laurence Binyon's *Sakuntala*; for, besides fairly reproducing the fever and the flavour of the original, they both succeed in making Kalidasa himself feel at home in an alien garb. Like Binyon, Sri Aurobindo also has made his verse rhythms often approximate to those of ordinary speech, as in:

My lord,

We will not talk of that. I have fulfilled  
My rite, and with observance earned your kindness.  
Girls, let us go ;<sup>1</sup>

or in:

Never heed that,

Speak boldly. She has given you up as hopeless.  
So doctors leave a patient, when disease  
Defies all remedy.<sup>2</sup>

But as frequently, or even more frequently, the blank verse luxuriates into arabesque and once experiences, if only for a moment, a sudden sense of glory:

The lily of the night

Needs not to guess it is the moon's cool touch.  
She starts not to the sunbeam...<sup>3</sup>  
His hair is matted all a tawny yellow  
Like ochre-streaks, his holy thread is white  
And brilliant like a digit of the moon.  
He looks as if the faery-tree of Heaven  
Came moving, shooting twigs all gold, and twinkling  
Pearl splendours for its leaves...<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 93.

It is often said that great poetry cannot be translated ; it can be, and it has been, again and again ; Sri Aurobindo, for instance, has repeatedly performed the feat. Neither Kalidasa's verse rhythm nor his honey-sweet music nor his peculiar verbal wizardry nor yet the precise texture of his thought is quite reproduced in Sri Aurobindo's English version ; but the poetical essence—what Pope called 'the fire' of it all—has somehow trickled through and it makes *The Hero and the Nymph* genuine English poetry.

It is impossible within the limits of a brief study to discuss in detail Sri Aurobindo's literary artistry as a translator and as a poet. His translations are never mere translations ; they are almost as a rule poems in their own right. The great translator—a Chapman, a Pope, a Fitzgerald, a Romesh Chandra, an Aurobindo—is more a partner than a slave and he gives us as much of himself as of the original, and the two in such harmonious fusion that it is ever a puerile task to attempt to dissociate one from the other. Thus *The Songs of the Sea*, that magnificent sequence that is almost a continuum of poetic iridescence, is as much Aurobindo Ghose as it is Chittaranjan Das, and indubitable poetry in any case. These forty "songs" are composed in a variety of rhythmical patterns and with unerring sureness of touch they evoke at once the strange lure of the sea, its abiding sublimity and its bottomless mystery. Quotation can but give a more or less distorted picture—for the whole sequence is to be considered one and indivisible, it is to be interpreted as the recollection in moving verse of the cry of the *jiva* for final union with the hourly experienced, yet unapprehended, mystery of the universe. No wonder the "Songs" have puzzled many critics. The sea is visualized, no doubt, in terms of colour, sound and rhythm ; but the sea is not simply the "Bay of Bengal" or the "Indian Ocean", but something much more elemental and much more ethereal as well. As it is to Ellida in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*, to Chittaranjan—and to Sri Aurobindo also—the sea is a veritable symbol of romance, a baffling concretion of multifoliate Nature, of its reserves of power no less than its undying mystery. Sri Aurobindo's verbal artistry is taxed to the uttermost—but the result is poetry: the sea is successfully evoked in a hundred and one different ways—it is the "unhoped-for elusive wonder of the skies", it is the "Infinite Voice", it is the "minstrel of infinity", it is the "shoreless main", it is the "great mad sea", it is the "illimitable", it is the "mighty One", and it is the "king of

mysteries"; the poet thus approaches the sea as a friend, as a lover, as a loyal subject, as a devotee, as a shadow that ever pursues the object, as a waif that would return to the bosom of the mother; and the music with its subtle undulations of dissolving sweetness fuses at last poet and reader and subject into a closed universe of harmony and bliss.

## VIII

Besides *Vikramorvasie* and *Sagar-Sangit*, Sri Aurobindo has also translated—with the same verbal mastery and metrical resiliency—Bhartrihari's *Niti Shatakam*, four chapters from the Udyog-parva of the *Mahabharata*, and several songs from the original Bengali, including Bankimchandra's immortal anthem, *Bande Mataram*. The renderings from Bhartrihari exhibit a rich variety in stanza-forms and one can judge Sri Aurobindo's feeling for the innate beauty of words even by merely studying the titles: "The Human Cobra", "Aut Cæsar aut Nullus", "Altruism Oceanic", "The Immutable Courage", "The Script of Fate", "Flowers from a hidden Root", "The Flame of the Soul", "Gaster Anaides", etc. Epigrammatic and aphoristic, *The Century of Life* is reared upon experience and worldly wisdom, and the incandescent fury of poetic imagination but fitfully shines upon these verses. Nevertheless the verses are crystal-pure and also crystal-clear, and one cannot withhold admiration from a literary artist who achieves lines like:

Only man's soul looks out with luminous eyes

Upon the worlds illimitably wise . . .<sup>1</sup>

The sweet fair girl-wife broken with bridal bliss . . .<sup>2</sup>

Seven griefs are as seven daggers in my heart . . .<sup>3</sup>

In the dim-glinting womb and luminous murk . . .<sup>4</sup>

Thorns are her nature, but her face the rose . . .<sup>5</sup>

*The Century of Life*, like most didactic poetry, appeals to the head rather than to the heart; but there are not wanting occasional flashes that penetrate much deeper.

*Vidula*, on the other hand, is a scream of passion—radiant, full-throated and immediately effective. Sri Aurobindo wields the Locksley Hall metre with commendable dexterity and power.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 194.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 211.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 217.

The mother's exhortation to the son acquires the topicality and universality of a moving patriotic anthem:

Sunjoy, Sunjoy, waste not thou thy flame in smoke! Impetuous,  
dire,

Leap upon thy foes for havoc as a famished lion leaps,  
Storming through thy vanquished victors till thou fall on  
slaughtered heaps . . .

When thou winnest difficult victory from the clutch of  
fearful strife,

I shall know thou art my offspring and shall love my son indeed.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo admits that the style of the original Sanskrit is "terse, brief, packed and allusive, sometimes knotted into a pregnant obscurity by the drastic economy of words and phrase."<sup>2</sup> But the "free poetic paraphrase" conveys an adequate impression of the original, and an occasional line like—

Gathering here an earthly glory, shining there like Indra's sun—  
—assumes a diamond's edge and glitter. However, it is only when the poem is read aloud at a stretch that it fully brings out Sri Aurobindo's mastery of rhythm and language which are often seen to be perfectly attuned to Vidula's tempestuous passion and truly torrential speech.

Very different is the effect produced by Sri Aurobindo's felicitous adaptations from Chundidas and other Bengali masters of song. Pieces like "Radha's Complaint in Absence", "Radha's Appeal", "Karma", "Appeal", "Hymn to the Mother", "Mother India" and "Mahalakshmi"—composed at widely separated intervals in the course of four or five decades—have all the lilt of song and make a ready assault on our emotions. It is, perhaps, a far cry from the Elizabethan simplicity and grace of the earlier pieces to the complicated harmonies of the more recent ones: but the hand of the literary artist is equally, if not to an equally fruitful extent, discernible in them all. If Shakespeare remarked that "Youth's a stuff will not endure", Sri Aurobindo sings that "Life is a bliss that cannot long abide": and the moral is the same, though not expressed in identical terms:

But while thou livest, love. For love the sky  
Was founded, earth upheaved from the deep cry  
Of waters, and by love is sweetly tied  
The golden cordage of our youth and pride.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 234, 242.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 231.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 133.

That is very pretty, in thought and in utterance, and so are all the pieces adapted from Chundidas; but the rendering of Bankimchandra is rather organ-voiced and deep throated and likewise "Mother India" and "Mahalakshmi", with their rhythmical elaboration, feast the ear and uplift the heart at once.

## IX

*Baji Prabhou* and *Perseus the Deliverer* are both original compositions. The former is a poem of action, and its rhythm and its language are of a piece with its sanguinary theme. Sri Aurobindo will give us not a second's respite, but fairly plunges—in medias res—into the heart of the bloody conflict. The first lines—

A noon of Deccan with its tyrant glare  
Oppressed the earth; the hills stood deep in haze,  
And sweltering athirst the fields glared up  
Longing for water . . .<sup>1</sup>

strike at once the key-note of the poem and one can already visualize—however dimly—the impending clash of arms and Baji's splendid heroism and victory in death. The "tiger-throated gorge" is evoked arrestingly and the vicissitudes of the mighty conflict are described with an excruciating particularity. One almost hears, with a shudder, "blast on blast" volleying "death invisible . . . upon uncertain ranks"; one involuntarily holds up one's breath as one reads the remorselessly vivid lines:

So was the fatal gorge  
Filled with the clamour of the close-locked fight.  
Sword rang on sword, the slogan shout, the cry  
Of guns, the hiss of bullets filled the air,  
And murderous strife heaped up the scanty space,  
Rajput and strong Mahratta breathing hard  
In desperate battle.<sup>2</sup>

The horror—and the pity—of it all! And so the narrative proceeds, with an inhuman, precipitancy, to the recordation of the deathless scene:

Quenched was the fiery gaze, nerveless the arm:  
Baji lay dead in the unconquered gorge.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 114.

In Sri Aurobindo, Baji Prabhau has found a minstrel worthy of his imperishable sacrifice: and the poem, written in vigorous blank verse and in words that unerringly and movingly evoke the shifting scenes of the battle, elects itself to an honourable place among the heroic poems in the English language.

*Perseus the Deliverer* is another triumph of Sri Aurobindo's art. A blank verse drama on a Hellenic theme is among the most difficult tasks that a modern English poet can set to himself; but Sri Aurobindo's play satisfies us as drama, as poetry, and also as an imaginative rendering of the ideas of evolution and progress. The dialogues are poetically intense and yet but rarely sound unnatural; the prose bits are full of pep and are not seldom drenched in indecorous gaiety; but Sri Aurobindo's art excels itself most in the great blank verse passages which accurately evoke either the terrible plight of an Andromeda chained to the cliff or the insane and inflated blood-lust of a Polydaon or yet the radiant serenity, the confident strength and the prophetic intensity of a Perseus. One cannot but respond with one's whole heart and soul as one hears Andromeda's piercing moans, as one watches her poisoning hope against bleak despair:

And thou, bright stranger, wert thou only a dream?  
Wilt thou not come down glorious from thy sun,  
And cleave my chains, and lift me in thy arms  
To safety? I will not die! I am too young,  
And life was recently so beautiful.<sup>1</sup>

Polydaon is pictured as the personation of a vengeful destiny; he is an engine of evil, gloating over his mad thirst for blood and lust for power; he will revel in death and destruction; he will make crimson rivers irrigate Syria's gardens; he will fill them with heads instead of lilacs; his destiny is to will what he desires and to achieve what he wills:

I am Poseidon

And I will walk in three tremendous paces  
Climbing the mountains with my clamorous waters  
And see my dogs eat up Andromeda,  
My enemy, and laugh in my loud billows . . .  
Sit'st thou, my elder brother, charioted  
In clouds? Look down, O brother Zeus, and see  
My actions! They merit thy immortal gaze.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 267.



But Polydaon's brief hour of vengeful glory ends abruptly and even this "monarch of breast-hackers"—to quote his "fellow-butcher", the loose-tongued Perissus—cannot choose but fall back dead. It is left to Perseus to emphasize the moral, not only of Polydaon's twisted career, but also of the many monumental conflicts between the Asuric and Divine forces in the universe:

But the blind nether forces still have power  
And the ascent is slow and long is time.  
Yet shall Truth grow and harmony increase:  
The day shall come when men feel close and one.  
Meanwhile one forward step is something gained,  
Since little by little earth must open to heaven  
Till her dim soul awakes into the Light.<sup>1</sup>

*Perseus the Deliverer* is thus no hothouse plant; notwithstanding its verse form—or, indeed, because of it—it has universality, it is for all time; and although its theme is but a variation of an ancient Hellenic myth, its interpretative power is unmistakable and it does offer a message of hope to this shaken and blood-boltered world.

## X

Only Sri Aurobindo's lyrics—and especially the lyrics suffused with the religious spirit—now remain to be glanced at. At no period of his life has Sri Aurobindo been blind to the spiritual reality underlying the material universe. He has never countenanced either of the great negations, and the denial of the ascetic has ever appeared to him as one-sided as the denial of the full-blooded materialist. Through all the bewildering vicissitudes of his life there runs nevertheless a strong, silken thread of aspiration to achieve an integral view of man, Nature and God. He could formulate, merely with the aid of his lucid and powerful intellect, a total world-view; but it will at best be just a tentative explanation. A satisfying world-view could be built up only on the sure foundations of mystical experience. Such experiences were indeed vouchsafed him in the Alipur jail. He experienced "It" during certain moments of utter felicity. But the experience proved to be—as all such experiences must inevitably prove to be—truly unwordable and ineffable. And yet Sri Aurobindo *would* attempt the impossible—as many

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 306.

mystics have done before him. What he said—or was to say—in the celebrated Uttarpada speech, Sri Aurobindo also said—and said frequently—in the more fluid medium of verse. In “Invitation”, for instance, which was actually composed in the Alipur jail, Sri Aurobindo suggests that the “It” comprehends winter and rough weather no less than sunshine and vernal showers; in “Epiphany” the meaning is more explicit:

The God of Wrath, the God of Love are one,  
Nor least He loves when most He smites. Alone  
Who rises above fear and plays with grief,  
Defeat and death, inherits full relief  
From blindness and beholds the single Form,  
Love masking Terror, Peace supporting storm.<sup>1</sup>

In “Who”, again, the rushing anapaests are made to convey an idea of the One underlying the Many, the changeless Reality informing the ever-changing world of our immediate experience:

It is He in the sun who is ageless and deathless,  
And into the midnight His shadow is thrown;  
When darkness was blind and engulfed within darkness,  
He was seated within it immense and alone.<sup>2</sup>

There are many more lyrics and a couple of dialogues—“The Rishi” and “The Birth of Sin”—all of which are the characteristic products of Sri Aurobindo’s preoccupations with the ultimate problems of existence. Some of them are only intellectually sustained and fail to acquire the piercing accents of poetry. Thus, for all its thought-content and mastery of phrase, one is not quite convinced that “To the Sea” or “The Vedantin’s Prayer” evokes either the unique poetic word or employs the appropriate rhythm, divinely appointed as it were to communicate these mystic truths. One admires the general technique, but one realizes also that technique has not here been transfigured into the unmistakable utterance of pure poetry.

Sri Aurobindo is a thinker, a philosopher, but he has been also a poet all along. Poetry should give us, not a system of thought, but the poetry of thought, not philosophy, but the poetry of philosophy. Sri Aurobindo has frequently achieved this feat of transfiguration. The failures are unimportant, the successes alone should demand our attention and compel our

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 123.

admiration. In the last two lines of "A Child's Imagination", Sri Aurobindo manages to convey a vast revelation:

God remembers in thy bosom

All the wonders that He wrought.<sup>1</sup>

In "Rebirth", again, rhythm and phrase fuse into a reality of poetic communication; and "The Mother of Dreams" rides triumphantly on the crest of a complicated rhythm and achieves a memorable articulation:

Thine is the shade in which visions are made; sped by thy  
hands from celestial lands come the souls that rejoice  
for ever.

Into thy dream-worlds we pass or look in thy magic glass,  
then beyond thee we climb out of Space and Time to the  
peak of divine endeavour.<sup>2</sup>

The pairs of interior double-rhymes and the impetuous anapaests give the lines a piquant rapidity of motion that is wholly appropriate to the theme. Likewise, some of the minor pieces also—notably, "Seasons", "God", and "An Image"—are at once elevating in theme, unblemished in their literary craftsmanship, and truly moving as poetry.

## XI

Sri Aurobindo's more recent poems—the revised version of "Ahana", *Siv Poems* (1934) and *Poems* (1941)—are in a category apart. Ahana is the "Dawn of God" and her advent is the occasion for universal rejoicings; the "Hunters of Joy" now sing a "Song of Honour" replete with innumerable evocations of sound and colour and inwrought with felicities of *dhwani* that tingle in the chambers of the subconscious for ever. Perhaps, the poem is just a little too long; the inspiration now and then flags and poetry gives place to padding—but that is, after all, inevitable in a long poem. And yet which modern poet has given us lines more nobly articulate than these:

Bliss is her goal, but her road is through whirlwind and  
death-blast and storm-race.

All is a wager and danger, all is a chase and a battle . . .<sup>3</sup>  
Memories linger, lines from the past like a half-faded tracing . . .<sup>4</sup>  
Fearless is there life's play; I shall sport with my dove from  
his highlands,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 154.

Drinking her laughter of bliss like a God in my Grecian islands.  
Life in my limbs shall grow deathless, flesh with my God-glory  
tingle,

Lustre of Paradise, light of the earth-ways marry and mingle . . .<sup>1</sup>  
Vision delightful alone on the peaks whom the silences cover,  
Vision of bliss, stoop down to mortality, lean to thy lover.<sup>2</sup>

Truly can "Ahana" be described as one long fascination and thunder of music, irresistible, life-giving, and all but overpowering. As it stands, "Ahana" is a palimpsest, a necessary bridge linking up Sri Aurobindo's earlier with his more recent poetry. Although parts of it are somewhat Swinburnian in movement and seeming thinness of content, the poem as a whole is among the most interesting and meritorious of Sri Aurobindo's poetical achievements.

Sri Aurobindo's recent poems are an attempt to achieve in English something equivalent to the *mantra*. Mystical experience, being by its very nature untranslatable in terms of logical categories, has perforce to borrow significance from the use of words and rhythms as symbols of, and as intimations from, something above and beyond ourselves. The great mystic poets of the world are thus inveterately "obscure", trafficking in symbols that perplex all except the initiated or chosen few who are able or willing to catch the lucent rays that emanate from the supernal Light. Such poetry has but rarely been achieved in the past—especially in English; it is, however, Sri Aurobindo's considered view that the future poetry—even in English—will more and more approximate to the *mantra*; it will minimise if not altogether eliminate the operations of meddling middlemen—the intellect, the senses, even the imagination—and it will effect in one swift, unfailing step the business of communication from the poet to the reader. As Sri Aurobindo has remarked, "the true creator (of poetry), the true hearer is the soul. The more rapidly and transparently the rest do their work of transmission, the less they make of their separate claims to satisfaction, the more directly the word reaches and sinks deep into the soul, the greater the poetry. Therefore poetry has not really done its work, at least its highest work, until it has raised the pleasure of the instrument and transmuted it into the deeper delight of the soul. A divine Ananda . . . is that which the soul of the poet feels and which, when he can conquer the human difficulties of his task, he succeeds in pouring also into all those

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 160-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 162.

who are prepared to receive it.”<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo would seem to have almost succeeded in conquering “the human difficulties of his task” and the dozen “futurist” poems that he has now given us constitute the culmination of his long and arduous poetic career.

Nevertheless, these recent poems have puzzled most readers, not only on account of their “obscurity”, but also because some of them handle unfamiliar metres—metres that seem to sway uncertainly between the rigid patterns of classical English prosody and the baffling vagaries of modern free verse. His illuminating essay on “Quantitative Metre” is, no doubt, a great help, but the poems are more—ininitely much more—than mere illustrations of a prosodist’s theories. Our doubts and difficulties, however, will tend to disappear if we approach the poems without preconceived notions of what poetry and metre should or should not be ; in other words, if we read the poems to ourselves, slowly and deliberately, keeping our physical no less than our inward ear open, and sheathing for the nonce our intellect’s razor-edge. If one reads thus a poem like “The Bird of Fire”, one will learn to discover in its unmanageably long lines and their abundant load of polysyllables an approximation to the primordial music—

Such as the meeting soul may pierce  
In notes, with many a winding bout  
Of linked sweetness long drawn out.

One can then read the other poems, feel a quickening of one’s pulses, share with Sri Aurobindo the “vision splendid”, re-live his experience by proxy, and repeat to the darkness and the stars such potent *mantras* as—

My mind is awake in stirless trance,  
Hushed my heart, a burden of delight . . .<sup>2</sup>  
My spirit sank drowned in the wonder surge . . .<sup>3</sup>  
My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight,  
My body is God’s happy living tool,  
My spirit a vast sun of deathless light.<sup>4</sup>  
Only the illimitable Permanent  
Is here . . .<sup>5</sup>

These lines, and indeed the poems in which they occur, are poetry *per se* ; they all aspire (to quote M. Abbe Bremond,

<sup>1</sup> *Arya* (January 1918).

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Poems and Plays*, II, p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 284.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 297.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 298.

though written in a very different connection and perhaps, in a different sense as well), "each by the mediation of its proper magic, words, notes, colours, lines—they all aspire to joint prayer".<sup>1</sup> It were sacrilege to analyse the literary art that has evolved, after a life-time of arduous metrical as well as spiritual discipline, such splendid poetic creations. One can attempt to scan the lines, enumerate the alliterative and other devices, explain an image here and a metaphor there,—but one is not nearer solving the eternal riddle that poetry is. When one reads a poem like "Rose of God", one knows it has the form and voice of the truest and purest poetry, one knows that here rhythm and phrase and meaning have coalesced into an utter harmony; and even as one slowly reads it—for the tenth or for the hundredth time—one feels

The melting voice through mazes running;  
Untwisting all the chains that tie  
The hidden soul of harmony.

And so one's enraptured ear demands that the strains be repeated again and again; and one is content to chant the poem as often as one likes and let its meaning sink deep into one's soul's recesses, there to abide for ever:

Rose of God, vermilion stain on the sapphires of heaven,  
Rose of Bliss, fire-sweet, seven-tinged with the ecstasies seven!  
Leap up in our heart of humanhood, O miracle, O flame,  
Passion-flower of the Nameless, bud of the mystical Name . . . .  
Rose of God like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,  
Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!  
Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss:  
Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life Beatitude's  
kiss . . .<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Garrod, *The Profession of Poetry*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Poems and Plays*, II, p. 302.

# Sri Aurobindo's Synthesis of Idealism and Materialism

BY VASANTA K. DONDE

Matter is certainly as real as spirit. It has remained so inspite of Idealists, Western and Eastern, who denied nature as an illusion. And that is why atheism has done a greater service to the Divine than theism itself. For, to deny matter is to remain in a helpless illusion of the spirit, an irreconcilable solipsism, as unreal as the Monism of the materialists. It is, therefore, our purpose to try to reconcile the apparent contraries of matter and spirit in the highest or the best possible unification, the truth of unity and multiplicity.

Materialism at least has achieved one great purpose and that is to prove beyond doubt the Monism of Matter or in other words, Force. Today the trend of scientific discoveries in different branches is towards finding out the *one* principle of force or energy underlying the diversity of the material phenomena. The apparent numberless things in the universe are ultimately shown to be the forms of one thing or substance and that too is no other than movement or energy, blind in itself but working with certain mathematical laws. Matter is thus a formulation of an unknown force. But the unknown is not the unknowable, and hence there is no room for the pessimism of the Agnostics.

The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo promises to show in vivid terms this reconciliation of matter and spirit, the reality of both of them, in the cosmic consciousness. He has achieved the so far unattainable synthesis of materialism and idealism. Both materialism and idealism have to make a stand on Monism in order to be consistent with themselves. Dualism, either in Materialism or Idealism, contradicts itself and cannot be logical nor even supported by the discoveries of science. Thus each of them has to resort to monistic philosophy to attack the other. And in this both are similar, for they present us with a "Maya" to explain the phenomenon. The *māyā* of the materialists is the blind, unknown impulsion of material energy which deceives us with a brief delusion of life at the crest of its waves. The

*māyā* of the spiritual idealists is practically the same kind of stuff, inexplicable in its origin as well as its workings, which is responsible for this mysterious phenomenon. Thus the problem of Reality remains unsolved but for this agency of *Māyā* or Blind Energy in both cases. It is therefore necessary that we go beyond this *māyā*, show beyond doubt that the world is not an illusion but a real entity, a form of the Being itself. The cosmic activity is not rejected by the Being as not its own. The Silence should not reject the Sound of the cosmos but, on the contrary, sustain it.

There is no need for us to prove the Being, for we live in it. It is the Being which is the base of all cosmic activity. But the Being itself was born of Non-Being. Pure Being is the affirmation by the unknowable of itself as the base of all cosmic existence, and the Non-Being is that which is the contrary affirmation of its freedom from all cosmic existence. The Non-Being permits the Being. The Reality is, therefore, Eternal Silence and Eternal Activity, the two sides of the same Existence. And if there is Eternal Truth there is also Eternal Falsehood. If the world is a dream or an illusion and the Brahman the truth, it is a dream existing in Reality, not out of Reality in any case, and the stuff of which it is made is that Reality. Thus the world is as real as the Brahman. Brahman is the material of which this world is made ; Brahman is the content of the same world. If the gold is real, says Sri Aurobindo, the vessel of gold is as real and can never be a mirage. Again, if the world is as much an illusion as what we get when we mistake a rope for a snake, we may argue that the illusion of a snake could exist because both the rope and snake were real entities. The mistake was possible because the snake was real sometime and somewhere before we had mistaken the rope for snake. The world, to be an illusion, must first be a real entity in order to be an illusion in a different form.

Thus there is an omnipresent Reality of which neither the Non-Being at the one end nor the universe at the other can be a negation. The materialist and the idealist are at the two poles of the same Reality, each stressing its own point of view and thus continuously playing a sea-saw in the field of philosophy. The Non-Being and the Universe are the two different states of the Reality, obverse and reverse affirmations. The highest experience of this Reality in the Universe shows it to be not only a conscious Existence, but a supreme Intelligence and Force and a self-existent Bliss.



If Brahman has entered into form and represented its being in material substance it can only be to enjoy self-manifestation in the figures of relative and phenomenal consciousness. The emergence of Life in the cosmic activity, the so-called evolution of Matter, is a self-representation, a self-discovery and a self-enjoyment. And this is going on eternally on account of the Divine Will.

Such is the synthetical philosophy of Sri Aurobindo which, as we shall see in the following pages, dispels all the doubts raised both by the materialists and idealists in the minds of thoughtful persons. Today, as never before, materialism is at a great advantage owing to the scientific discoveries that are daily piling up. The old mysteries of life and cosmos are shrinking every day on account of the greater and greater macrocosmic and microcosmic inquiries into the nature of the Universe as a whole ; and it is natural for the scientists to proclaim that the day will not be far when even the last mystery will be solved. Even then the doubting mind is not satisfied with the answers given by science. For, with the growth of scientific knowledge we are becoming aware more and more of the infiniteness of Existence and its solution or the last gate where we are to stop is withdrawing further and further like the mirage in a desert. Moreover, Matter, the prism of the cosmos according to the materialists is changing its colour with every new discovery. Matter is receding fast and its old qualities are giving way to not only new but quite revolutionary ones, which make a man suspect that the term "matter" in this case would be a misnomer. And it is not his fault if he thinks that "matter" has long changed to "spirit".

We turn to the theory of consciousness in order to acquaint ourselves with Sri Aurobindo's solution of the problem. For, it is the consciousness which is the point where philosophers parted ways, some to the path of Idealism, others to Materialism. Had it not been for this strange quality born out of cosmic activity, there would have been complete identity of views among all the thinkers of the world as to the nature of Reality.

Generally all our conscious experience is psychological. Also, whatever we experience unconsciously is physiological and in a way a mechanical movement of Matter. For example, the heart beating while a man is in a swoon is the latter kind of unconscious movement which can be compared with other mechanical movements of Matter like the electronic movement round the nucleus. On the contrary, whatever is done con-

sciously by us is received through the agency of senses and translated into the terms of the sense-mind, the *Manas* as called by Indian philosophers. *Manas* or mind is the sixth sense, in as much as it is not an independent entity but dependent on something beyond for the realisation of true knowledge.

Even in its ordinary activity it assumes a double role. One may be called the objective and the other subjective. One is impure or mixed, the other pure and unmixed. In the former the mind is one with the external world through its sense-doors, while in the latter it is aware of itself, *e.g.*, when we are angry or are aware of our emotions. There are two kinds of identity. The experience which is always an activity of mind is in its nature knowledge by identity. It is said that it is really a habit that we can experience only so much of the true knowledge as the senses convey to us through sensations. As a matter of fact, we are identifying ourselves with the external world knowing it by an indirect method which brings in the agency of senses. There are limitations imposed upon us by evolution which has made mind accustomed to physiological functioning and their reactions whenever we enter into relation with the material universe. The mind can, as proved by hypnotism, take direct cognizance of the objects of senses without the aid of the senses themselves. For, in sleep the waking mind is liberated from the bondage of certain physiological limitations and works as a subliminal mind. The experience that is obtained by mind through the sense-doors can be gained by it also without their intrusion. These sense-doors become necessary to an ordinary human being because he is not so much evolved as not to require the help of the senses. The moment his mind becomes powerful enough to connect itself directly with the outside world it gets its knowledge by identity. This kind of identity is possible only because the same principle of consciousness which resides deep in the mind exists also in the outside world that human mind experiences. The only difference is that whereas the outside world has not awakened to consciousness but is a prey to blind movement of Matter, the human consciousness is not so. On the contrary, the more powerful it becomes the more able it is to know the world by identity and free to move in it at its will.

We know that the cessation of the mental states or, in other words, the functions of the mind does not mean the cessation of the principle of consciousness. Even mind itself is an outer aspect of the subliminal mind and so on till it is nothing but a

surface ripple of "consciousness". This principle of consciousness is not restricted only to an organism ; it can be present in the outside world, though it may not express itself outwardly in the form of mind. Mind in that respect is only an outer ring of human consciousness. It can never be absolute nor can it be treated exclusively. Compared to the field and the potentialities of consciousness, it is insignificant, and as such those philosophies which try to probe into Reality as an object of mental experience or knowledge, will never satisfy human aspirations.

Consciousness is therefore the more important principle to be dealt with by philosophers and the problem of consciousness in its relation to Matter is the only problem which demands to be solved first. The whole history of philosophy, whether Eastern or Western, is a history of struggle between Matter and Spirit, a struggle to determine their rival claims to priority. As far as science is concerned, it maintains, with the authority of the experiments so far made, that Matter preceded consciousness and that the latter arose in Matter in the course of evolution. To a materialist monist Brahman is Matter, while to a spiritualist monist of the type of the Indian philosopher "Matter also is Brahman".

The drive of science is also towards monism which can be made consistent with multiplicity or variety. And this idea is not at variance with the Vedic idea which describes things in the cosmos as one seed arranged by the universal energy in multitudinous forms.<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo has given a very rationalistic explanation of the Upanishadic philosophy while interpreting the same through the terminology of materialism. It neither supports the ascetic view-point of Shankara nor extreme materialism. It does not negate Matter and run to the pure conscient nor does it negate Spirit and run to stark matter. It admits both matter and consciousness and covers both to reach the synthesis of Divine Life.

With him Matter expresses itself eventually as a formulation of some unknown Force, and Life begins to reveal as an obscure energy of sensibility imprisoned in its material formulation. Life and Matter are therefore not dual entities as Joad wants us to believe but forms of the same principle of Pure Consciousness. The sense of gulf between Life and Matter is removed when Ignorance is dispelled, and Mind, Life and

<sup>1</sup> Swetaswatara Upanishad, VI. 2.

Matter are then seen to be nothing else than Energy combined in a triple formulation, *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*. And when we recognise the Energy as *Sat* (Truth), *Chit* (Consciousness) and *Ananda* (Bliss), we cannot admit the conception of a brutal material Force as the creator of Mind or Consciousness. The Energy that creates a world is naturally a Will which, in other words, is only consciousness applying itself to a work and a result. What is that work, asks Sri Aurobindo, if not a self-involution of Consciousness in form and self-evolution out of form so as to actualise some mighty possibility in the universe it has created?

To the materialists who refuse to be led further than what is received as experience by way of senses, he says that science itself is trying to remove the sensible physical means for the intermediate transmission of the physical force, *e.g.*, wireless telegraphy. The force is preserved at the points of impulsion and reception. And he promises that in future even these points will disappear when the laws of supra-physics are studied. The mind will then directly act on the physical energy and work on it to the required result.

This will be possible when we know how to communicate and be one with the cosmic consciousness which is the basis of all the Energy in the Cosmos. For this Energy is not blind and consequently brutal, but has an errand and has to achieve certain result. Beyond this cosmic consciousness there is, says Sri Aurobindo, yet more transcendent,—transcendent not only of the ego, but of the cosmos itself, against which the universe seems to stand out like a petty picture against an immeasurable back-ground. Also, if materialism insists on Matter as reality on the support of logic or experience, spiritualism can meet the argument by an equally cogent logic and an equally valid experience of Yogins like Sri Aurobindo. The materialists try to convince us that the supra-sensible is not real because they are not able to perceive what is not given by the physical senses as it is not organised as gross matter. Even in the world of Matter there are truths which cannot be cognated by means of physical senses. This is being proved day after day by psychical researches; we have therefore to admit that there is an extensive field of the supra-sensible not yet traversed by human reason.

According to the claims of Indian philosophy there are supra-physical senses called "*Sookshma Indriya*" in "*Sookshma Deha*" (finer senses in finer body) with certain vision and experience beyond the visible and ordinary senses. These can take

cognisance of the Reality, including the material world, without the aid of our ordinary corporeal sense organs and thus bring us into identical contact with an organisation of conscious experiences that are dependent not on gross matter of which this cosmos is made, but on a different principle. The reason why the methods employed and the results obtained in the glimpse of supra-physical realities are in disrepute is that they are defective. Modern science, till very recently, would not even condescend to inquire into their validity. They were treated as heresay not deserving any sympathetic approach. Indeed the way leading to supra-physical experiences always passed through the mysterious domain of consciousness, because it was supposed that consciousness is the only underlying principle and the moment a communion is established with it all other doors would open automatically.

In fact consciousness is the eternal witness of the cosmic activity. The universe exists only in and for the consciousness that observes and has no independent Reality. As against this, we have the thesis of the materialists, especially dialectical materialists that Matter (material universe) is self-existent. Just as it was prior to the birth of life and mind, so also it will survive even after no trace of life is seen anywhere. This difference in the outlook is metaphysical. But it also affects the outlook on practical life. Sri Aurobindo thinks that if we push the materialist conclusions too far, we arrive at an insignificance and unreality in the life of the individual and the race, which leaves us, logically, the option between a feverish effort of the individual to snatch something from a transient existence and the self-less service of man and the race to which he may belong. Materialism, like Spiritual Monism, thus arrives at a *Māyā* that is and yet is not,—is, for it is present and compelling, is not, for it is phenomenal and transitory in the works. The *Māyā* of Spiritual Monism takes you by a different road to still more definite conclusions, *viz.*, the fictitious character of the individual ego, the unreality and the purposelessness of human existence, the return into the Non-Being or the relationless Absolute as the only escape from the vortex of a senseless life-activity.

Not only that the principle of consciousness is admitted but Sri Aurobindo goes further and maintains that the extension of our consciousness into the cosmic consciousness is a fact, and a possibility of a cosmic consciousness in humanity is being slowly admitted in modern psychology. This joining of the

individual consciousness with the cosmic consciousness is achieved by the Yoga practices and is an ideal kept before their eyes by the Indian Sādhakas.

The Sādhaka, by virtue of thus entering into the cosmic consciousness, becomes aware of Matter as one and the multiplicity as being created out of that. Further, not only do we become conscious of this cosmic existence but also conscious in it, sensing the pulsation of the cosmos, becoming fully aware of the same. We live in the cosmic consciousness just as we live in our ego-consciousness. This is achieved solely because there is an identity between the individual and the cosmic consciousness. We become conscious of the minds and bodies of other organic bodies and the substance of the inorganic world just as we are conscious of the ego and its activities. Thus, we can rule over other bodies just as we can control our body, vibrate with other minds as if they are our own, and this is done in the most simple and direct manner. The curtain between ourselves and others is lifted completely.

But what is beyond this individual and cosmic consciousness? What is the nature of Reality and the relation of Matter to consciousness? These are the principal questions to be solved.

In the Taittiriya Upanishad (11.7) it is said that, "In the beginning all this was the Non-Being. It was then that the Being was born". This Non-Being is not the Nihil, because existence cannot come out of nothing, nor appearance nor illusion even. These will require some base in existence. What is this Non-Being then? We term it Non-Being because by this Nothing we only mean something beyond the last term to which we can reduce our purest conception and abstract or subtle experience. It lies beyond our positive conception. To explain it further we may say that the conception of Non-Being can be compared with that of Professor Einstein's "Finite but Unbound Universe". Just as Einstein maintains that the Universe is finite to the extent to which it is subject to mathematical measurements, but that does not mean that nothing lies beyond that. The Universe extends still beyond that and hence it is infinite though finite which can be reduced to the mathematical term. Similarly, Non-being lies beyond Being. Whereas Being is that portion of Non-Being which can come within the purview of the last term of Consciousness, Non-Being is that Infinity which lies beyond even the purest conception based on Consciousness. It is we who, being on this side of Being, term it as

Non-Being for the sake of expressing an entity which is beyond any expression. And if we term it Non-Being it is due to our inability to express it in a better way. In any case, Non-Being cannot be Nihil.

When we say Being, says Sri Aurobindo, came out of Non-Being, we refer to the element of Time. It is a contrary-affirmation of its freedom from all cosmic existence, as Being presupposes cosmic existence. The Non-Being permits the Being just as Silence permits Activity, or, in other words, it is the Silence which gives meaning to Activity. Without Silence Activity cannot exist. The Reality is thus made up of both. Non-Being and Being are the different states of Reality, obverse and reverse affirmations.

Time and Space are the two categories of our consciousness, conditions under which we arrange our perceptions of phenomena. So long as we remain on the pedestal of individual consciousness taking a limited view of Reality, the categories of Time and Space appear to us to be something objective as the phenomenon itself. For there is no doubt that the phenomenon is conditioned by Space and Time which are its qualities. They are not abstract conceptions as long as we are in the phenomenon. For Matter, to be real, is made up of "events" having both space and time simultaneously. But we get quite a different picture when we look at existence itself. Time and Space disappear in the infinite consciousness. The conception of nearness or distance disappears as also of past and future. For every thing is then near and far off, past and future. It is "this", or existence itself. If there is duration, it is not temporal but psychological. The extension and duration represent to the mind something not translatable into intellectual terms but merged into one eternity, an all-containing, all-pervading point without magnitude.

Space and Time are the two nodal points of Becoming. But the very conception of movement carries with it the idea of energy abstaining from action, an absolute not in action is purely and simply absolute existence. Also movement can be understood in relation to potentialities of repose. If the indefinable action alone is true without any repose it means we have the "Nihil" of the Buddhists who believed in the eternal wheel of action, of karma, of movement. It is comparable to a stair-case without a support in the void. And hence along with the pure existent, the becoming, the energy and movement are also a fact, a reality. We have thus the fact of Being and Becoming.

Stability which is represented by Being, and movement which is represented by Becoming, are only psychological representations of the Absolute, and equally so are oneness and multitude. The Absolute is, however, beyond stability and movement, i.e., Being and Becoming, it takes its eternal poise in the one and the stable, and whirls round itself infinitely, inconceivably and securely.

And it is the Becoming that assumes a form in the shape of Matter and its Force. Mind and Matter are different grades of the same energy, different organisations of one conscious Force of Existence. Even if it is granted that consciousness has evolved out of Matter, nothing can so evolve which is not already involved in it. There is thus no reason for us to stop at life coming out of Matter. Even the development of recent research and thought points towards an obscure beginning of life and perhaps a sort of inner or suppressed consciousness in the metal and in the inanimate, perhaps the first beginning of the stuff of consciousness that is seen in us.

No doubt at this stage the word consciousness changes its meaning. It is no longer synonymous with mentality but indicates a self-aware force of existence of which mentality is only the middle term. Below this mentality the consciousness appears in the form of vital and material movements which are for us subconscient; above it rises into the supra-mental, which is for us the super-conscient. Anyway, the principle of consciousness remains the same throughout, organising itself differently. It is *Chit* as energy, creating the world. Here we arrive at that unity which materialistic science perceives from the other end, asserting that Mind cannot be a force other than Matter but must be merely a development and outcome of material energy. Indian thought at its deepest insight asserts, on the other hand, that Mind and Matter are different grades of the *same* energy, different organisations of one conscious Force of Existence.

But how can we give this attribute of "consciousness" to Force? For consciousness implies some kind of intelligence, purposefulness, self-knowledge even though in some cases these remain quite imperceptible to our ordinary senses. To this Sri Aurobindo replies that even in the inanimate operations there is a supreme hidden significance, "hidden in the modes of its own workings". These operations which we consider wasteful and meaningless may be so from the human point of view which is very, very limited. The consciousness of man is nothing but a form of nature's consciousness. It is there in other involved



forms below mind ; it emerges in mind ; and it shall ascend into yet superior forms beyond mind. For the existence which manifests itself in them is conscious Being.

The fundamental difference between Matter and Spirit lies in the fact that matter is the culmination of the principle of ignorance, blindness and mechanical movement. Philosophers siding with materialism may ask how the Being changes into matter, or, in other words, how consciousness turns into Matter. The reply is that here consciousness has lost and forgotten itself in a form of its work, as a man might forget his very existence, his self-awareness, in extreme absorption, forget not only who he is but that he exists at all, and become for that moment the work itself and the force that does the work. Thus when consciousness develops in Matter, it is the Consciousness which had lost itself, returning again to itself, emerging out of its long forgetfulness slowly but surely as a Life which is first in the pre-sentient stage, then half sentient, sentient, and finally struggling again to become directly self-conscious, free, infinite and immortal.

# The Ideal of the Jivanmukta

BY ANILBARAN ROY

Although consenting here to a mortal body,  
He is the Undying ; limit and bond he knows not ;  
For him the aeons are a playground,  
Life and its deeds are his splendid shadow.

—Sri Aurobindo.

The cessation of all kinds of misery for all time to come is part of Kaivalya or Nirvana or Moksha, which is regarded as the Parama Purushartha or the highest aim of all beings. All systems of Indian Philosophy and spiritual disciplines regard Ignorance as the root cause of all pain and Knowledge as the means of liberation. This knowledge is not something mental or intellectual, it implies a change of consciousness, a change of being. To attain this knowledge we have to grow out of our present mould of consciousness, and, as desire is the binding knot of present consciousness, it is by renouncing desire that we make ourselves fit for liberation. Giving up our pre-occupation with the life of the senses we turn inward and find the silent, immutable, eternal Self within us, and by practising constant union with it we grow into the spiritual consciousness and accomplish our divorce from all contact of pain. That Self within us is the eternal Brahman, and seated in that Self we realise our unity with Brahman, and indeed become Brahman and enjoy the bliss of the Brahman consciousness. And all this we can accomplish in this life and in this material body. Thus the Brihadaranyaka and the Katha Upanishads say: "When all the desires that cling to the heart are loosed away from it, then the mortal becomes immortal, even here he possesses the Eternal." (Bri. IV-4-47).

What is this Immortality spoken of by the Upanishad, and in what sense can it be attained in the material body? It seems to be the view of the Upanishads that one can have only a taste of Immortality in the material body, but in order to possess it fully one must leave this body and pass to a supercosmic existence. Thus the Chhandogya says: "The Brahman-knower

becomes ready for liberation but has to wait for its full realisation until the fall of the body" (6/14). The Brihadaranyaka says, "This bodiless and immortal Life and Light is the Brahman" (IV. 4. & 7). "He (the Brahman-knower) becomes the Eternal and departs into the Eternal." (IV. 4. 8). "Long and narrow is the ancient Path,—I have touched it, I have found it,—the Path by which the wise, knowers of the Eternal, attaining to salvation, depart hence to the high world of Paradise." (IV. 4. 8). The Upanishads are however clear that the knot of the Ignorance can be rent even in this body (Mundaka, II. 1. 10). The condition of a man who has cut the knot of Ignorance, but still has the body is known as *jivanmukti*. With the disappearance of Ignorance, such a man becomes freed from all suffering, and is not compelled to be born again as all his works fall away from him and perish (Mundaka, II. 2. 9); so he can be properly called *mukta* or the liberated man. How does such a liberated man live and act as long as he retains his body? This is a practical question, and was asked by Arjuna, the type of the pragmatic man. The Gita has given two types of the Jivanmukta, one lower and another higher. The Mundaka also makes a distinction among Brahman-knowers. As there is some difference of opinion about the real condition of the Jivanmukta, we shall briefly consider the subject in some detail. We shall leave aside the question as to what happens to the liberated man after he leaves the body, whether he loses his individuality and merges himself in the Eternal or whether he lives in some higher world in eternal ecstatic union with the Divine Beloved. We may note here in passing that all these different views are not really conflicting, they all express aspects of a Truth which is many-sided, and an integral knowledge will have to take into account all of them. Such an attempt at a synthesis was made in the Gita. "The liberation of the Gita" says Sri Aurobindo, "is not a self-oblivious abolition of the soul's personal being in the absorption of the One, *sayujya mukti*, it is all kinds of union at once. There is an entire unification with the supreme God-head in essence and intimacy of consciousness and identity of bliss, *sayujya*, for one object of this Yoga is to become Brahman, *Brahmabhuta*. There is an eternal ecstatic dwelling in the highest existence of the Supreme, *sālokyā*.—for it is said, "Thou shalt dwell in me," *nivasishyasi mayyeva*. There is an eternal love and adoration in a uniting nearness, there is an embrace of the liberated spirit by its divine Lover and the enveloping Self of its infinitudes, *samipya*. There

is an identity of the soul's liberated nature with the divine nature, *sadharmya mukti*,—for perfection of the free spirit is to become even as the Divine, *madbhāvam āgatah*. The orthodox Yoga of knowledge aims at a fathomless immergence in the one infinite existence, *sayujya*; it looks upon that alone as the entire liberation. The Yoga of adoration envisages an eternal habitation or nearness as the greater release, *salokya, samipyā*. The Yoga of works leads to oneness in power of being and nature, *sadrishya*. But the Gita envelops them all into one greatest and richest divine freedom and perfection." (*Essays on the Gita*).

How far can this perfection be reached in this material body? Is the body an obstacle to the liberation, or can it be turned into a means and an instrument for the highest perfection and the most integral union with the Divine? Most spiritual disciplines regard the body as an obstacle; thus the Upanishadic text quoted above lays it down clearly that for the full realisation of the liberation one has to wait up to the dissolution of the body by death. But this was not the view taken in the Vedas. The Vedas speak of the life in higher worlds, but they believe in the possibility of bringing down the powers of those worlds for enriching the terrestrial life. "O Flame," says the Vedic Rishi, "thou foundest the mortal in a supreme immortality for increase of inspired Knowledge day by day; for the seer who has thirst for the dual birth, thou createst divine bliss and human joy." (Rig. Veda, I-31. 7). Though the Upanishads had a longing for the supracosmic existence, and that also must be a part of the integral spiritual experience, the Indian mind never altogether lost the ideal of a terrestrial divine life set before it by the Vedic Rishis, and it has asserted itself in diverse ways inspite of the great influence of the ascetic and world-shunning schools of thought and spiritual discipline. And we find this in the changes that have taken place in the ideal of the *jivanmukta* or the living liberated man.

The body, it is said, is created by our past *Karma*, it is there to give us the fruits of our good or bad actions done in the past. But if with the attainment of knowledge all our actions are burnt away, how is it that the body does not fall immediately? The Brahma Sutras found out an ingenious explanation for this for reconciling the apparently conflicting Sruti texts on this subject. The explanation of the Brahma Sutras amounts to this: "Three kinds of *karma* can be distinguished. *Karmas* gathered in past lives admit of two divi-

sions, those that have borne their effects (*prārabdha karma*) and those that still lie accumulated (*sancita karma*). In addition to these two kinds, there are *karmas* which are being gathered here in this life (*sanciyamana*). Knowledge of reality destroys the second kind and prevents the third and thus makes rebirth impossible. But the first kind which has already borne effects cannot be prevented. Hence the present body, the effect of such *karma*, runs its natural course and ceases when the force of the *karma* causing it becomes automatically exhausted, just as the wheel of a potter which has been already turned comes to a stop only when the momentum imparted to it becomes exhausted. When the body, gross and subtle, perishes, the *jivan-mukta* is said to attain the disembodied state of liberation (*videha-mukti*).” (An Introduction to Indian Philosophy by S. C. Chatterji).

But this exception made in regard to *prārabdha karma* seems to be arbitrary, as the Sruti as well as the Gita clearly lay down that all actions, *sarva karmani*, are destroyed by knowledge. And the above classification of *karma* is also not found in the ancient Srutis; the Sankhya and the Yoga systems and also the Gita do not accept it. Perhaps it was due to Buddhistic influence that this explanation was adopted. But how otherwise to explain the persistence of the body even after the attainment of knowledge? The Yoga philosophy says that the body persists only if the liberated man wills to keep it for some purpose, and that purpose can only be to help other people towards the attainment of liberation. The Gita also seems to take the same view. Thus the Lord says: “It is an eternal portion of Me that becomes the Jiva in the world of living creatures and cultivates the subjective powers of *Prakṛti*, mind and the five senses. When the Lord takes up the body (he brings in with him the mind and the senses) and in his going forth too (casting away the body) he goes taking them as the wind takes the perfumes from a vase” (15/7, 8). Thus it is quite clear that the taking up of this material body by the soul is not a matter of compulsion by some beginningless *Karma*, as is supposed by the Buddhists, and its persistence does not depend on the blind force of past *karma*. The soul freely takes up its body and leaves it from birth to birth, and it being a portion of the Divine can do so only for fulfilling some divine purpose. And what can that purpose be but the manifestation of the Divine in and through many forms? So, though the Gita also speaks of the return of the soul ultimately to the

supracosmic existence, it gives the utmost importance to the life of the body as an instrument of fulfilling the divine will on the earth.

Thus the Gita's ideal of the *Jivanmukta* is essentially different from that of the *Brahma Sūtras*. According to the latter, the life and activities of the liberated man are determined by his past *karma*; so they can be in no way different from that of an ordinary man who has not the knowledge of Reality. The outer personality goes on in the old way, only the liberated soul does not get attached to it. Thus it follows that he can, in his outward life, indulge in sinful activities, and they will do no harm to him. Indeed it has been said that the activities of a liberated man may outwardly be like those of a madman or even of a *pisācha*. This however the *Brahma Sūtras* does not admit; it holds that the liberated man will act only according to the Scriptures. But this is a position which is not logically tenable. Shankara is more consistent when he says that works ordained by the Scriptures are incompatible with the life of a man who has attained knowledge; his works are confined only to the maintenance of the body, and that also is done by the mechanical impulses of Nature. So, according to Shankara, the only life possible for a liberated man is that of a *sannyāsi* who has renounced the world. Not only that, Shankara even goes so far that no one can attain true knowledge unless he has renounced the world and all its activities. The *Brahma Sūtras* leans towards this view, but on account of its allegiance to the *Sruti*s and its recognition of the demands of the active nature of man, it asserts that the liberated man who likes to do so can take up *sannyāsa* or live a worldly life; but if he does the latter, he must act and live according to the Scriptures. But if in this way the liberated man chooses and determines his own actions, he is not really liberated, he is still bound to egoistic ignorance and to the *gunas* of Nature.

The ancient Upanishads however are quite definite that a liberated man does live in the world and follows the ordinary pursuits of men; only those acts do not create any bondage for him. Thus the *Chhandogya* says: "There he moves about, laughing, sporting and rejoicing, be it with women, or conveyances, or relatives,—not minding the body in which he was born." (VIII. 12. 3). The *Isha* says: "Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years. Thus it is in thee and not otherwise than this; action cleaves not to a man." Against this recognition of the active and emotive side

of man and the insistence on living one's life in full, there was the Buddhistic teaching of the vanity and the illusoriness of life, and we find already the influence of it in the interpretation of the Srutis given in the Brahma Sutras. It is interesting to note how the Brahma Sutras explains away the verse of the Isha Upanishad. It says that that injunction for doing work is a general remark, and does not mean that the Brahman-knower should do works. But as the context shows that the injunction refers to the enlightened, the next Sutra gives another explanation that it is meant only to glorify knowledge (B.S. III. 4. 13, 14). Shankara afterwards took up this ingenious method of explaining away the works of a liberated man. The Gita saw the danger of this tendency and sought to find a sound philosophical basis for the activities of a spiritual and liberated man, and that it found in its great conception of the Purushottama. The Gita showed that "in the spiritual domain there is possible not only the discovery of the self and spirit, but the discovery of the uplifting and guiding light of spiritual consciousness and the power of the spirit, a spiritual way of knowledge, a spiritual way of action." It is probable that this teaching of the Gita largely influenced Mahayanist Buddhism; previously the Buddhist ideal of a liberated man was a life like that of a rhinoceros wandering in the forest; under the influence of the Gita the ideal became that of compassionate action and social service. It was this ideal which was taken up later by the Christian missionaries who, in their turn, have greatly influenced modern India where an attempt has been made to combine spirituality with social service.

The period that followed in India after the promulgation of the teaching of the Gita was "the most splendid, sumptuous and imposing millennium of Indian culture." Kalidasa is the great representative poet of this age; his writings and those of his contemporaries give us the picture of "a high culture, a rich intellectuality, a great and ordered society with an opulent religious, aesthetic, ethical, economic, political and vital activity, a many-sided development, a plentiful life-movement." Then followed a decline in the vitality of the Indian people, and the philosophical teaching of the Buddhists emphasising the illusoriness of the world began to tell on their minds. People were turning more and more to the life of the mendicant and the *sannyāsi*. A situation arose similar to that in which the Gita was written, and a similar attempt was made to meet the situation. We find an evidence of this in the voluminous

philosophical-poetical work, the *Yogavasistha*. As the *Gita* starts with the despondence of Arjuna, so the *Yogavasistha* imagines Ramchandra as a prince with ascetic tendencies and proceeds to reconcile him to a life of activity and worldly enjoyment. But there was an interval of many centuries between these two works and in the meantime the Indian mind had moved further away from the age of intuitive spiritual experience towards intellectuality. Arjuna was a man of action, but the Rama of *Yogavasistha* was a philosopher who turned away from life through philosophical reasoning about its emptiness and vanity. The *Yogavasistha* has not the depth and the spiritual power of the *Gita*; it accepts the Buddhist view that the world is an illusion and an utter unreality, but at the same time holds that this is also the teaching of the Vedanta, that the *Shunya* of the Buddhists and the Brahman of the Vedanta are identical. And as the world is unreal, what is the meaning in renouncing it? So act and live in the world, enjoy all that it can give, all the time remembering that all this is an illusion; then you will have eternal peace within, which is not disturbed by any outward activity. The *Yogavasistha* describes elaborately the condition of the *Jivanmukta* which has greatly influenced later Indian thought. Here are some of its descriptions of the living liberated man: "He regards his activities as a part of the Cosmic Movement, and performs them without any personal desire. He never hankers for the pleasures that are not in his hand, but enjoys all those he has. The idea of "I" and "mine", of something to be achieved and something to be avoided, has died within him. No purpose of the sage is served by any activity, nor by abstaining from activity. He therefore does as the occasion suits him. Even doing all sorts of actions, the liberated one is always in *samadhi*. He is a *mahā kartā* (great worker). He works without any anxiety, egoistic feeling, pride or impurity of heart. He is a *mahā bhoktā* (great enjoyer). He does not discard the pleasure that he has got, nor desires the pleasure that he has not got. He finds equal pleasure in old age, death, misery, poverty and in ruling over an empire. He eats with equal gusto the eatables of all tastes, of ordinary and superior quality. He does not paralyse any one of the natural functions of his body for want of proper exercise. His body is a kingdom unto him, over which he rules wisely and well. He keeps it healthy, and does not starve it of its appropriate requirements. So far as the external behaviour is concerned, there is no difference between the liberated and the ignorant. The



difference, however, consists in the presence of desire in the case of the latter which is totally absent in the former. 'The life of a liberated sage is really the noblest and happiest life. From him goodness is scattered all around.' (*The Yogavasistha* by B. L. Atreya).

Obviously the *Yogavasistha*, in formulating the ideal of the *Jivanmukta*, was influenced by the ancient Upanishads and the Gita; but it has neither the vision of the former nor the synthetic philosophy of the latter; so we find many incongruities in the ideal and the lack of a sufficient philosophical basis. Its conception of the ultimate Reality is of an eternally inactive and silent Brahman, in which somehow the illusion of the world has arisen. If one realises this truth and becomes free from all desire and egoism, wherefrom will he get any motive force for action? Shankara saw this discrepancy, he accepted the philosophy of the *Yogavasistha*, turned it from a somewhat chaotic form of *Adwaita* to a rigorously logical system, but he definitely rejected its ideal of the *Jivanmukta*. The *Yogavasistha* gives in poetical language a vivid picture of the sexual union of *Jivanmukta* men and women, and all this is shocking to Shankara. According to the latter, the body is full of pain and no wise man should ever have any bodily pleasure which is always bound up with pain. The saying of the *Chhandogya* that a liberated man sports with women is not taken seriously by Shankara: according to him this passage is an eulogy of the knowledge of the self; it only means that knowledge is so powerful that even if a *jnani* commits such a heinous act, he will not be affected. The passage must not be literally understood as allowing moral lapses in the case of the *jnanin*. Shankara knew human nature sufficiently well to see that an ideal like that propounded in the *Yogavasistha* was bound to lead to abuse; people would indulge in all sorts of sensual activities and cover them with a veneer of verbal spirituality. He knew that the greatest enemy of spiritual life was sensual desire, and that as long as a man lives in the body he can never be altogether safe from its attack. So he advocated the life of complete renunciation for the *sadhaka* as well as for the *siddha*. But that does not solve the problem of human life. If desires have such a strong hold on men, how are they to be rooted out or conquered? A few exceptional men may be able to do violence to their nature and tear themselves away from the life of the body, but what about the rest? And may it not be that behind this persistent desire of men there is some truth, in the discovery of which alone lies the true

solution of the problem? The Tantrics even went so far as to say that the indulgence of these desires, which are regarded as the greatest obstacles to a higher life, may be turned into a powerful means for the attainment of that life. It is obvious, at any rate, that in order to find a true solution of the problem of life, we must have an integral knowledge of Reality and take into account all the sides of human nature. Though India remained satisfied for a long time with the spiritual ideal given by Shankara, there has again set in a reaction against the ideal of *sannyasa* and a strong move towards making the best use of the terrestrial life. And it is curious that many modern thinkers in India are turning to the ideal given by Yogavasistha. In philosophy they accept the Advaita of Shankara, but in practical life they want to follow the Western ideal of activism. The only truth in this attitude is that the external life of man must be based on spirituality ; but for this the Advaita of Shankara does not furnish a sufficient basis. If we accept the view of Shankara that there is no dynamism in the ultimate Reality, no spiritual power which can be invoked to uplift the external life of man, then we must admit that life is not worth living ; only ignorant men blindly attached to the life of the senses can remain satisfied with the present life of humanity which is so full of misery and frustration. All illumined souls would seek, like Shankara, an escape into the silence of the Eternal.

But the truth is that the silence of the Eternal is only one aspect of it ; it has also a dynamic aspect, a power of the spiritual consciousness, and in that lies the hope of humanity. "Mind and life themselves," says Sri Aurobindo, "cannot grow into their fullness except by the opening up of the larger and greater consciousness to which mind only approaches. Such a larger and greater consciousness is the spiritual, for the spiritual consciousness is not only higher than the rest but more embracing. Universal as well as transcendent, it can take up mind and life into its light and give them the true and utmost realisation of all for which they are seeking ; for it has a greater instrumentality of knowledge, a fountain of deeper power and will, an unlimited reach and intensity of love and joy and beauty. These are the things for which our mind, life and body are seeking, knowledge, power, and joy, and to reject that by which all these arrive at their utmost plenitude is to shut them out from their own highest consummation. An opposite exaggeration demanding only some colourless purity of spiritual existence nullifies the creative action of spirit and excludes from

us all that the Divine manifests in its being ; it leaves room only for an evolution without sense or fulfilment,—for a cutting off of all that has been evolved is the sole culmination ; it turns the process of our being into the meaningless curve of a plunge into Ignorance and return out of it or erects a wheel of cosmic Becoming with only an escape-issue." (The Life Divine, Vol. II, p. 586).

The Gita corrects the defect of materialism by showing that without union with the Spirit and the Divine, the life of man is bound to be full of misery and frustration, *anityam asukham lokam* ; on the other hand, it corrects the defect of asceticism by showing that one can live a spiritual and divine life even in this material body. For this it is first necessary to find the eternal Self within us and secondly "to possess and govern from that inner eternity of being the course and process of the becoming." "These changes are possible only by a withdrawal from our absorbing material preoccupation,—that does not necessitate a rejection or neglect of life in the body,—and a constant living on the inner and higher planes of the mind and the spirit. For the heightening of our consciousness into its spiritual principle is effectuated by an ascent and a stepping back inward—both these movements are essential—out of our transient life from moment to moment into the eternal life of our immortal consciousness ; but with it there comes also a widening of our range of consciousness and field of action in time and a taking up and a higher use of our mental, our vital, our corporeal existence. There arises a knowledge of our being, no longer as a consciousness dependent on the body, but as an eternal spirit which uses all the worlds and all lives for various self-experience: we see it to be a spiritual entity possessed of a continuous soul-life perpetually developing its activities through successive physical existence, a being determining its own becoming. In that knowledge, not ideative but felt in our very substance, it becomes possible to live, not as slaves of a blind Karmic impulsion, but as masters—subject only to the Divine within us—of our being and nature." (The Life Divine, II-678).

That is essentially the ideal of the *Jivanmukta* as we find it presented in the Gita. The first stage of it is that of the *Gunātita*, when the sadhaka enters into the silence of the *Akshara*, the immutable Self within us. (14/22-25). He initiates no action but leaves all works to be done by the *gunas* of Nature. This is really the *Jivanmukta* as envisaged by the Brahma Sutras as well as by Shankara, though they do not follow the conception to all

its logical consequences. As the liberated man does not associate with the *gunas*, which go on in their play by the force of the sanction given in the past, they will fall into rest by themselves after sometime. But the Gita does not stop there. One can become *Gunātita* also by adoring the Purushottama who is higher than even the immutable Self, who has both the immutable and the mutable, the silent and the active as two aspects. By union with the Purushottama the liberated man seated in the silence within makes his natural being a channel of the dynamism of the Purushottama. "There is a status then which is greater than the peace of the *Akshara* as it watches unmoved the strife of the *gunas*. There is a higher spiritual experience and foundation above the immutability of the Brahman. There is an eternal dharma greater than the *rajasic* impulsion to works, *pravṛtti*, there is an absolute delight which is untouched by *rajasic* suffering and beyond the *sattwic* happiness, and these things are found and possessed by dwelling in the being and power of the Purushottama." (Essays on the Gita).

That is the Gita's ideal of the *Jivanmukta*. But though in order to attain it we need not do violence to our natural powers but have to turn them all in utter consecration to the Purushottama, it is nevertheless a very difficult ideal and very few can reach it. The Lord himself says in the Gita, "Among thousands of men one here and there strives after perfection, and of those who strive and attain perfection one here and there knows me in all the principles of my being." (VII. 3). There may be a few *Jivanmuktas* in the world, but what about the rest of humanity? Are they to suffer innumerable miseries, as they are doing now, to the end of time? In that case, will it not be the greatest act of compassion to discourage the will-to-live in the race, so that it may soon end its miseries by ending itself? That has been virtually the main spiritual teaching in India for more than a thousand years, and the result has been catastrophic. But that is not the goal set before India by her ancient Rishis; the death of India will mean the end of all chance of the spiritual regeneration of humanity and the guiding Power of India, the Indian Shakti, can never allow that. So we find her to-day discovering her spiritual idea in a new light. This is the new light that "Earth-life is not a lapse into the mire of something undivine, vain and miserable, offered by some Power to itself as a spectacle or to the embodied soul as a thing to be suffered and then cast away from it; it is the scene of the evolutionary unfolding of the being which moves towards the revelation of

a supreme spiritual light and power and joy and oneness, but includes in it also the manifold diversity of the self-achieving spirit. There is an all-seeing purpose in the terrestrial creation ; a divine plan is working itself out through its contradictions and perplexities which are a sign of the many-sided achievement towards which are being led the soul's growth and the endeavour of Nature." (*The Life Divine*, ll. 588.)

Thus the Ignorance which is the source of all the miseries of mankind is only an intermediate stage in the evolution of the race towards an integral knowledge. Not only a few exceptional men, but the human race will in the course of evolution grow into a spiritual consciousness which will found "the mortal in a supreme immortality". "He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys immortality." (Isha 11). It is the business of the *Jivanmukta* to help mankind to attain this consummation on the earth:

Only to bring God's forces to waiting Nature,  
To help with wide-winged Peace her tormented labour  
And heal with joy her ancient sorrow,  
Casting down light on the inconscient darkness,

He acts and lives. Vain things are mind's smaller motives  
To one whose soul enjoys for its high possession  
Infinity and the sempiternal  
All is his guide and beloved and refuge.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo's Collected Poems and Plays, Vol. II, p. 286.

# Questions and Answers

BY A. B. PURANI

*"Questions and Answers" is a form as old perhaps as human awakening to knowledge and even to-day it has not outgrown its utility.*

[It is immaterial to ask who is the questioner, for even though the immediate person might be a certain individual, ultimately it is the unenlightened, eternal seeker in man, the ignorant human mind, that questions. And it is the illumined Teacher that answers. Questions are conditioned by the questioner, his mentality and his need, and the answers are relative to him and his condition, *i.e.*, they cannot be absolute and final].

Q. What is Nirvāna? Does it consist in the merging of the individual into the universal consciousness?

A. No. The word "Nirvāna" has been used and popularised by the Buddhists. Buddhism does not accept the existence either of the individual or the universal soul or consciousness. Buddha applied himself to the solution of the problem of suffering and came to the conclusion that suffering was due to Desire—Trishnā, as he calls it,—the human thirsts for the satisfaction of impulses. Man suffers because he seeks personal happiness, and because he is moved by his ego. To cure his suffering man must renounce this seeking; and the rejection of Desire to be thoroughly effective requires the complete cessation of the Ego.

Q. Buddhism then accepts the Ego-sense?

A. Yes. It accepts the ordinary machinery of human psychology without either trying to probe deep into its foundations, or inquiring as to its possible higher evolution or goal. That is why one does not find answers to questions regarding the origin and the ultimate aim of soul and cosmos in early Buddhism. It is primarily concerned with the psychological method or processes for the removal of suffering.

Q. Where, then, does Nirvāna come in in the elimination of suffering?

A. "Nirvāna" literally means "windless state". As the flame

of the lamp goes out for want of air, so does the human ego with its apparatus of Nature without support. Suffering ends because its cause, the ego, the natural personality, is blotted out entirely.

- Q. What is the natural personality and how is it annihilated?
- A. Man has within him the sense of Ego, the feeling of an "I" which is entirely a creation of nature. It is a constantly changing entity playing on the surface of consciousness. Buddhists realize its impermanence and reject it, i.e., they refuse to identify themselves with thoughts and ideas of the mind, with feelings of grief and joy in the heart, with desires and passions of the *Prāna*.
- Q. What happens then to Universal Nature that is outside him?
- A. As the cognising Ego ceases within him, so Nature also ceases to exist for him. It is like the great *Pralaya*—the universal dissolution,—in which the whole outer world loses its reality entirely and utterly.
- Q. What then? What is *after* Nirvāna? Cannot one get tired of mere Nirvāna?
- A. After Nirvāna? Nothing. Your question reminds me of a friend of mine who used to ask me "who gets the experience of Nirvāna?" The question is irrelevant. Nobody has the experience of Nirvāna: nobody is there to get tired of Nirvāna. My friend seemed to think like you that he would be sitting somewhere safe in his mind and looking at Nirvāna and say to himself "Ah! this is Nirvāna"; as a matter of fact, so long as "you" are there, Nirvāna is impossible. Something in you drops off and Nirvāna takes its place. It is not, therefore, as if one gets Nirvāna—on the contrary, it demands the entire blotting out of all that one is in his ordinary nature.
- Q. Has this negative state of Nirvāna any utility for the *sādhaka* of Integral Yoga?
- A. Yes. Like all spiritual experiences this also has its utility for the *sādhaka* of Integral Yoga. It is one of the experiences that can come on his way. To attain Nirvāna one is required to get rid of all his attachments and all personality based on ignorant nature. The Integral Yoga also requires one first to get rid of, and then go beyond the ignorant nature and its personality.
- Q. What is the difference between Buddhist Nirvāna and Vedāntic experience of Nirvāna?
- A. As we saw above, the Buddhists aimed at release from

suffering. So, for them "putting out of lamp" for want of air or oil was quite enough. Thus their Nirvāna was rather negative in character and did not imply the attainment of a higher state or consciousness or enjoyment of delight. It does not contemplate any fulfilment or *siddhi*.

When the Vedānta accepted Nirvāna as an experience, they called it "Brahma-Nirvāna"—release into the Brahmic consciousness. This implies the attainment of a positive consciousness—after the release from the bondage of nature—and the enjoyment of liberation.

Q. Can action continue after Nirvāna?

A. The Buddhist does not seem to accept the possibility of action after the attainment of Nirvāna. Amitabha in his infinite mercy for suffering humanity refused to enter Nirvāna till the whole of mankind was released from suffering and so was ready for Nirvāna. This stage is recognised as that of the *Bodhi-sattwa*.

The Brahma-Nirvāna spoken of above aims at realising the Brahmic consciousness, *i.e.*, a consciousness higher than the mental consciousness of the ordinary intellectual mental being, man. Beginning from the material and physical consciousness upto the mental consciousness is the realm of Ignorance or Avidyā. Above are the realms of Truth and Light or Vidyā. According to this view, Nirvāna of the lower nature can be a stepping stone to the attainment of the higher Truth-Consciousness.

Taking the analogy of the lamp once more, we can say that the lamp can continue to burn and it can even burn brighter if the oil and air are supplied not from Ignorance below but from Truth and knowledge above. So Nirvāna need not involve annihilation of all activity.

Q. Does Nirvāna then mean the realisation of the Non-Being?

A. Nirvāna can be the beginning of a negative path of which the Non-Being is the final stage. There are two ways of arriving at it: the path of the Buddhists and that of Tao. Nirvāna leads one to the experience of the *Shunyam* according to some Buddhists. Whereas Tao believes that *Shunyam*, though it is not any particular thing, contains everything. It almost seems very near the Vedantic idea of the Brahman. But it is better to distinguish this Buddhistic Nirvāna from the Brahma Nirvāna, of which the Gita speaks.



- Q. From where does one generally start towards the realisation of the Non-Being?
- A. Generally one starts with the mind *i.e.*, not the ordinary intellectual but the spiritual mind and ascends towards it. The realisation of the Non-Being means the negation of all the terms formulated by the mind about Being. But really speaking, that is only a gate of entry into a certain aspect of the Absolute.
- Q. If the Non-Being is beyond the mental consciousness, how is the Non-Being related to the planes of the Overmind, Supermind, Sachchidananda, etc.?
- A. Ascending beyond the Mind one can follow either the negative path and reach the Non-Being aspect of the Divine, or take the affirmative way in which case one passes through the Overmind to the Supramental and to the Sachchidananda, which-itself is, again, both static and dynamic at the same time. Going beyond it one arrives at what may be called the Great Non-Being—the aspect of the Absolute not turned towards manifestation. The Gita most probably calls this the *anirdesyam—Indeterminate*.
- Q. Is there anything beyond this Non-Being?
- A. Non-Being is only a term applied by the mind to express the Supreme Existence: in reality it is nothing else but an aspect of the Supreme Being.
- Q. One of my friends used to put the position trenchantly thus: From the point of view of the Purusha there are three aspects of the Being: (1) Purusha or Self. (2) Ishwar or God. (3) Brahman, the Reality Omnipresent.

The Monists of Shaṅkara's school relegate Ishwara to the background and insist on the unity of the Self and Brahman. The Buddhists negate the very existence of the Self and arrive at Non-Being, though, according to some schools of Buddhism, it is not mere negation.

- A. Like all trenchant statements it has some truth. But it is the harmonious action of all the three aspects which, in reality, are one that is needed for an integral perfection. The three terms seem to be fundamental to any scheme of Divine Manifestation.

# The Integral Vision of India

By SISIRKUMAR MITRA

The past of India has yet to be properly appraised. The spiritual adventures that she has undertaken throughout the ages, especially in the early days of her history, cannot be said to have been studied in all their deeper implications, at least in their bearings on the destiny of this great country. It is therefore necessary to emphasise that an insight into, and a correct revisioning of, the cultural achievements of the race in their true perspective is indispensable to the future rebuilding of India, to the understanding of the forces that are to bring about a resurgence of her soul. It is said that India has a message for humanity. There is no doubt that she has. But scarcely has any attempt been made to have an exact idea of what the real character of that message might be. A spiritual message is a vague term. Such evangels about the ancient wisdom of India some of her great sons have already delivered to the world in her recent past. And India has, because of them, begun to figure more prominently before the seeing mind of humanity. But the inner India, her soul, has yet to say her last liberating Word, the Word that would bring into birth a new world and solve for ever the problems of mankind.

The story is indeed a romantic one of how India carried on her epic-quests into the profundities of life and God and every thing that inwardly or outwardly concerned the terrestrial existence of man. The fruits of her unique *tapasyā* for millenniums are treasured in her sacred literature and in other relics and antiquities ; but they are reflected more unmistakably in the very life of the people, in the continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavours of their soul. Her earliest days, however, were the most glorious when she had the deepest of her spiritual experiences, when she saw the supreme Reality manifesting itself in every form of creation, when she saw in man his divinity, and proclaimed that man can become that divinity, become a god, become one with God, become the ineffable Brahman. But India's was not an exclusive spirituality. To her the powers of matter, life and mind were no less

real than those of the Spirit ; and in the search after their truth her seers discovered that in them is inherent the Spirit which is seeking to unfold itself in the earth-nature. Life, mind and body were therefore regarded as the condition for the Spirit to fulfil itself in the terrestrial existence of man. Thus did India make the first attempt to solve the most vital of problems, the problem of harmony between life and spirit, of which the vision came to her seers almost at the very dawn of her history. In what follows is given an outline of the story of how India tried through her creative activities to fulfil that integral ideal in the life of the race and of how thereby she has grown in her preparedness so that she is able today to revision that ideal in its deeper significance, to reaffirm it with greater precision and to show to humanity the path by which it will be led to the realisation of its highest spiritual destiny. This is the mission to discharge which India has stood through the ages "preserving the Knowledge that preserves the world".

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It cannot be said that Indian history so far has given due importance to its earliest period which, in Sri Aurobindo's revealing exegesis, is the most brilliant and creative in the world of the spirit. Indeed whatever efforts in the same sphere India made in the subsequent epochs have, every one of them, been inspired by the truths that came to the seeing intuition of her early seers. The beginning of this spiritual age in India is shrouded in the dim past. The date with which the Rig Veda Samhita is usually associated represents the close of a long period of vigorous and incomparable inward pursuits of which an idea may be had from the opulent imagery and mystic symbolism of the sublimest *mantrams*, seen by the Rishis and expressed in the *riks*. There is reason, however, to believe that greater ages of Intuition, of the luminous Dawns of the Forefathers, had preceded the Rig Vedic times, and that the entire secret of their esoteric teachings was not probably revealed even to the Rishis of the Rig Veda who were perhaps not ready for it. Yet the Rig Veda has every claim to be regarded as the most authentic document recording the Aryan Fathers' deepest experiences of the higher worlds, whose golden light came to their vision revealing to them the path of the gods. The end of human life was to these mystics a divine outflowing. "Life is therefore, a

movement from mortality to immortality, from mixed light and darkness to the splendour of a divine Truth whose home is above in the infinite but which can be built up here in man's soul and life, a battle between the children of Light and the sons of Night, a getting of treasure, of the wealth, the booty given by the gods to the human warrior, a journey and a sacrifice." If a state of permanent living in light, in truth, in bliss, in freedom and in immortality is his ultimate destiny, man will have to attain that in his life by overcoming the limitations imposed on him by his subjection to the forces of darkness, division and falsehood. The Vedic idea of sacrifice with the soul of man as the enjoyer of its fruits points to the path that leads to this conquest. Of all his gains and works, of all that he himself is and has, man must make an offering to the powers of the Godhead, the powers of Consciousness, the gods, who recognise in the soul of man their brother and ally and desire to help and increase him by themselves increasing in him so as to possess his world with their light, strength and beauty. It is not therefore that man only invokes the gods to descend into his world, into him in response to his sacrifice, the gods also have need of man to whose awakened soul they send their call to combine with them against the sons of Darkness and Division. And victory in this battle—an ultimate certainty—means a new birth for man, a divine becoming; for, liberated from his bondage to the lower nature, man becomes ready for a divine manifestation. The sacrifice is also a journey, an upward journey, which man undertakes in quest of his supreme goal, and as he does that, he grows from one state into a still higher one till he finds himself before the full Ray of the Light, and in possession of all the treasures of heaven. "Play, O Ray, and become towards us", was the constant prayer of the Vedic seekers. And sacrifice is the way by which the fruit, "the raining of the world of light", can be obtained. The ascent towards the light will fulfil its purpose only when the descent will take place bringing into the lower the pure experience of the higher. But the effective descent would mean a global widening, an increasing on every side into the wholeness of the world of light. This is the integral vision envisaged in the Veda. If by sacrifice the lower principles of man's earthly existence are conquered and made amenable to the influences of the Light which will take them up into itself, into their respective higher terms from which they originated, it is, again, by a similar act, but of vaster significance, that the Divine

manifests in the human vehicle enlarging it into the infinity of his own being.

The Vedic seers discovered the essential nature of the terrestrial existence as Sachchidananda veiled in the phenomenal oppositions of matter, life and mind, but compelling in the earth-nature an effort to cleave through these contrary conditions and eventually arrive at its own unveiled Splendour, the Perfection implicit in it. These conditions are grown and developed in the earth to create in it the necessary field for a greater Manifestation. They are derived in the lower planes from their original principles in the higher hemisphere; Mind from the light of the Truth-Consciousness, Life from the energy of the Consciousness-Force, Matter from the substance of Existence. The mystics had the vision of the plane of the Truth-Consciousness whose power is as well inherent in the earth as the above principles but is not, unlike them, active in it, and whose descent into the earth would effectuate that Manifestation towards which it is labouring. It is this plane which is the link between the lower hemisphere and Sachchidananda. "Man ascending thither strives no longer as a thinker but is victoriously the seer; he is no longer this mental creature but a divine being. His will, life, thought, emotion, sense, act are all transformed into values of an all-puissant Truth and remain no longer an embarrassed or a helpless tangle of mixed truth and falsehood. He moves lamely no more in our narrow and grudging limits but ranges in the unobstructed Vast; toils and zigzags no longer amid these crookednesses, but follows a swift and conquering straightness; feeds no longer on broken fragments, but is suckled by the teats of the Infinity. Therefore he has to break through and out beyond these firmaments of earth and heaven; conquering firm possession of the solar worlds, entering on to his highest Height he has to learn how to dwell in the triple principle of Immortality." Thus in the psychological and therefore the real implication of the Vedic teaching life with all its powers is affirmed as a field for the gods' adventure, for a divine efflorescence. If man is of the earth, he is also of heaven; and his godhead will be reborn in him when "Heaven and Earth equalised join hands in the bliss of the Supreme".

With this integral vision of the Infinite and of an infinite existence for man as the perennial source of inspiration India started on her quest of that which would bring her its realisation in the life of the race. This movement from the Rig

Vedic times traced not a straight line but a curve, luminous all through because of its origin being in the light to which it is naturally inclined to return, and it proceeded in a downward course with the purpose of illumining the different parts and planes of man's being so that he might be prepared for the perfection that is to come to him in the future. It is not that India could always hold fast to that ideal ; but the great epochs of her history are those in which she turned her eyes towards it and strove with all her soul to actualise it in the life of the race, to give form to its truth in the varied expressions of her creative life. For, it is to this sublime seeing of the early fathers that the mind of India does rightly trace all its philosophy, religion and essential things of culture, all the beginnings of the future spirituality of her people. The curve of her destiny showed the first sign of its downward tendency when the Vedic age of Intuition was passing into the Upanishadic age of intuitive Thought in which the first glimmerings of the dawn of Reason were perceptible. In the Veda intuition had a more free play, since mind and life were then plastic enough to its influence. In the Upanishads mind being more active than life it absorbed whatever intuition had to offer for its as well as life's illumination. Nevertheless, there must have been a strong basis of life-force for the vigorous spiritual efforts that were made by the Vedantic mystics. People lived a rich and robust life and a harmony there surely was between it and the intense seeking after truth that was so much in evidence among the kings and nobles no less than among the sages and saints of the time. Royal courts and forest hermitages were humming with these activities ; and such glowing examples were not solitary as those of the *Rājarshis* or sage-kings like Janaka ruling over a vast empire and at the same time living the unfettered, luminous life of the Spirit ; and of the kings of sages like Yajnavalkya to whom truth was greater than anything, yet who accepted with both hands worldly possessions along with spiritual riches. But how did they discover this harmony? By knowledge, which to the Upanishadic seers was always the knowledge by identity with the object of knowledge in a higher than the mental plane of consciousness. It is while engaged in the pursuit of this truth of knowledge that the seers realised that the knowledge of self is the highest knowledge, and that "the self in man is one with the universal self of all things and that this self again is the same as God and Brahman, a transcendent Being or Existence, and they beheld, felt, lived in the inmost truth of all things in the universe and

the inmost truth of man's inner and outer existence by the light of this one and unifying vision." Harmony among our parts of nature is emphasised in the Upanishads as a basic necessity in spiritual life. And this harmony may be brought about by inward concentration that will put us in touch with our psychic centre in the inner heart which is connected through a hundred channels with the lines of our individual consciousness. The psychic represents the Transcendent in the universal Nature and is intended on earth to manifest the Transcendent through its universalised individuality of mind, life and body. It is the 'golden' nucleus of our evolving personality. This is a distinctive contribution of Indian thought. The West could not go beyond the conception of the individual, mind being to her the highest power possible to man. Whereas in India the Spirit is held to be the highest truth of man, and through it was realised his infinite possibility. Integration of all his powers into the psychic, an aspect of the Spirit in man, would mean the building up of a perfect personality ready for ascension into higher heights of his being. As the seeker opens into the power of his psychic he becomes capable of drawing into himself from Nature such forces as may purify and exalt their lower counterparts in him. With this affinity established between his inner nature and the outer, the seeker rises into a higher consciousness and from there into the yet higher of the Transcendent which is the ultimate aim of the Upanishadic teaching. And to that end, all egoistic impulses, all sordid attachments must be completely eliminated from nature. "Life has to be transcended in order that it may be freely accepted; the works of the universe have to be overpassed in order that they may be divinely fulfilled." The whole view comprised by the oneness of life and spirit was there but the greater urge that characterised the period was always towards the realisation of the transcendent Truth, through which new riches of world-knowledge, God-knowledge and Self-knowledge did however come within the possession of the early mystics. If the Vedic basis was in the main psycho-physical in which life was not only recognised but emphasised as a condition of a greater life, the Upanishadic was fundamentally psycho-spiritual. Yet the latter was very little more than a restatement, in less symbolic but more intelligible terms, of the truths expressed in the former. "The Upanishads did not deny life, but held that the world is a manifestation of the Eternal, of Brahman, all here is Brahman, all is in the Spirit and the Spirit

is in all, the self-existent Spirit has become all these things and creatures ; life too is Brahman, the life-force is the very basis of our existence, the life-spirit *Vāyu* is the manifest and evident Eternal, *pratyaksham brahman*. But it affirmed that the present way of existence of man is not the highest or the whole ; his outward mind and life are not all his being ; to be fulfilled and perfect he has to grow out of his physical and mental ignorance into spiritual self-knowledge." The most inspiring record of revelatory knowledge, the Upanishads have throughout the ages exercised their profound influence over almost every sphere of man's spiritual, religious and cultural life both in India and abroad.

## II

During the age of the Spirit, the Veda and the Vedanta affirmed the ideal giving to the Indian mind through the universality of their teachings that peculiar synthetic cast which became so clearly defined in its catholic outlook, especially on matters concerning the social and religious welfare of the people. The age of the Dharma that followed witnessed a comprehensive plan being worked out to bring about an integral development of man's individual and collective existence. It was marked by such constructive efforts as resulted in the fixing of the external forms of Indian life and culture in their broad and large lines. The Vedantic soul of India begins to take its body, but it is a body which is, or has always tended to be, one with its soul ; because the body here has no meaning without its indwelling Spirit. It is this idea that governed every kind of social thinking in ancient India : law-makers and psychologists were ever alive to the fact that everything in life acquires its value only when it helps and converges on the attainment by man of his spiritual perfection. That is why recognising the complexity of human nature they tried to discover its right place in the cosmic movement and give its full legitimate value to each part of man's composite being and many-sided aspiration and find out the key of their unity. The result of this endeavour was the laying down of the four fundamental motives of human living, *artha*, *kāma*, *dharma* and *moksha*, man's vital interests and needs, his desires, his ethical and religious seeking, his ultimate spiritual aim and destiny. The other institution evolved as a corollary to the above was



that of the four stages of life in which the first was the period of education and preparation based on this idea of life ; the second, a period of normal living to satisfy human desires and interests under the moderating rule of the ethical and religious part in us ; the third, a period of withdrawal and spiritual preparation ; and the last, a period of renunciation of life and release into the Spirit. It is clear from the above two basic conceptions of the ancient Indian social theory, more so from the first, that it accepted, and provided for a disciplined satisfaction of the claims of man's vital, physical and emotional being, since the ego-life of *kāma* and *artha*, desire and self-interest, must be lived and the forces it evolves brought to fullness, so that the eventual aim of a going beyond may be accomplished with less difficulty ; the claims of his ethical and religious being governed by a knowledge of the law of God and Nature and man, because *dharma* is not merely a religious creed but a complete rule of ideal living by which life is to be guided to its fulfilment, each individual growing into his perfection, and to that end, developing his creative faculties, which will bring well-being not only to him but also to his society ; the claims of his spiritual longing for liberation, for, the Law, Dharma, and its observance is neither the beginning nor the end of man ; beyond it is the great spiritual freedom which man must claim as the ultimate end of his existence. An integration into this supreme goal of the whole tendency of man comprised by *kāma*, *artha* and *dharma*, seems to be the ideal emphasised by the social thinkers of India. This was, indeed, a very great attempt to build a synthesis, and although in later days an over-emphasis of the last aim and the consequent neglect of the others disturbed the social equilibrium for a while, it cannot however be denied that the steadfast following of all these aims by the people produced vast results, so brilliantly described in the great epics. In the Ramayana the ethical side of man's nature is given an extreme importance and its fulfilment is sought through the sincere performance of the duties formulated by the ancients. It pictures an age of heroic action and of an early and finely moral civilisation ; whereas the Mahabharata reflects a puissant intellectualism, the victorious and manifold mental activity of the age, which gives its character to the culture then prevalent in the country. Heroic action there was, but it had in it more of thought than in the Ramayana. There is no doubt that all the human activities depicted in these two grand expressions of the creative soul of India were inspired by

the ancient ideals, although a tendency towards external formation and construction both in the social and mental life, for which the periods mainly stood, detracted from their effort to revision the past in its pristine purity. Hence the curve of India's adventure went further down making an arc from where it had started and confined itself for a time to the region of the mind; but, we may repeat, the curve is a luminous one, and the mind of India is sustained by it in its innate spiritual inclination, of which an outstanding evidence in the latter period is the supreme truth revealed in the Gita, in which a harmony is built of the three great means and powers, Love, Knowledge and Works, the dynamic sublimations of the power of heart, of mind and of life, through which the soul of man can directly approach and cast itself into the Eternal. Here the harmony aimed at reaches its highest point when by a complete self-giving to the Godhead man becomes the fit instrument for a divine manifestation.

The essential idea in this age was to bring to bear upon the creative powers of mind and life the past spiritual experiences of the race. But the attempt was made, as naturally, through the exercise of the ethical and intellectual faculties both of which developed out of a deep understanding of man's interior profundities. But however high and pure their standards, they are born of the powers and impulses of the mind. Be they the four motives or the *āśramas*, they all of them belonged to the same category of human creation as the cultures characterised by them and embodied in the epics. So in those early days the mind of India went through its first round of experiences ample enough to enable it to be ready for the great classical age that came as a flowering of the intellectuality of the previous epochs into curiosity of detail in the refinements of scholarship, science, art, literature, politics, sociology, mundane life. The creative soul of India broke into a myriad forms of stupendous cultural activity almost unexampled in the history of human civilisation. But the source of it may be found not so much in Buddhism as in the recognition by the ancient psychologists of the varied motivations of human personality, and in the necessity of their proper fruition, also emphasised by them, for which systematic provision was made in the structure of the society. Buddhism came and by its liberal teachings helped to usher in an era of social regeneration in the country, and thereby created conditions favourable to the progress and advancement of culture. It, however, represents

an important phase in the spiritual life of India. Of the two directions in which the mind of India seemed to be moving about the time when Buddhism, aiming at a kind of ethical ascension, started to be a force in the life of the people, the one is the expression of its creative genius and the other is the denying of life as being a bondage and an obstacle to spiritual pursuits. But the seeds of both of them had been already sown in the age of the Dharma; those of the former we have just noticed, those of the latter might be traced to the longing for release into the Spirit, the Beyond, from this mundane existence, so broadly indicated in the ideals of *moksha* and *sannyāsa*, which had not a little to do with Buddhistic conception of *Nirvāna*. When the true seeker found that religion was compromising with life, subjecting its high spirit to the satisfaction of the latter's unspiritual demands and was thereby deteriorating into soulless forms of mere externalia and priestly obscurantism, so much in evidence about the time of Buddha's advent, it was but natural that he should think of nothing else but an ascetic withdrawal from life in order to be able to live exclusively in the spirit, in the pure truth of religion,—an idea towards the growth of which there might possibly have been some contribution from the Upanishadic aspiration for Transcendence. But this attitude, as indisputable objective proofs testify, did not very much and materially affect the abundant vitality and creative energy that were so boldly exhibited by the race in its continuous cultural endeavours for centuries, all through sustained by its inborn spirituality, an echo of which is noticed in the ideal of universal fellowship, preached and practised by Asoka—the first internationalist of history—the deeper springs of whose love for humanity and interest in its religious welfare as were always behind those efforts of his, are to be found not so much in his adherence to the ethical conception of the *Dhamma* as in the natural spiritual disposition of the country to which he belonged. And the creative activities of the age almost everywhere in their wide range reflected this tendency. The light of the Spirit was touching mind and life and was also in some instances guiding their movements, but it did not rule them as a governing principle, perhaps because they were not ready and needed more experiences for their fuller expression in the Spirit. Perfection of man will be attainable to him only when he will accept in every member of his being the absolute rule of the Divine, for which he must acquire the necessary readiness.

## III

The classical was an age of scholars, legislators, dialecticians and philosophical formalisers. It witnessed the creative and aesthetic enthusiasm of the race pouring itself into things material, into the life of the senses, into the pride and beauty of life. The arts of painting, architecture, dance, drama, all that can administer to the wants of great and luxurious capitals, received a grand impetus which brought them to their highest technical perfection. It is indeed an age of life's many-sided blossoming into such activities as brought to it all the colour, richness and experience necessary to its preparation for the greater perfectibility in the future. And mind also was equally vigorous in the externalisation of life's impulses having thereby its due share of growth and experience. It is in this great age—rightly called the first Indian renaissance—that classical sublimities found their splendid expression in the poetry and drama of its representative literary mouth-piece, Kalidasa, and in those of the galaxy of its poets and dramatists, that the recension of the epics was completed, most of the *Purānas* were written, the *Dharmasutras* were codified, the *Smritis* were given their present form, the Sankhya and Mimamsa philosophies were systematised, the *Silpasastra* (Fine arts), the *Kāmasutra* (Eugenics, Erotics and allied subjects) and the *Sukraniti* (Polity) were written, the ancient Indian ideas on Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Botany, Zoology, Medicine and Mineralogy were rendered into their respective treatises through which they are known today, the masterpieces of art at Ajanta, Bagh and Ellora etc. were produced, the famous figure of the Buddha was evolved along with the *sikhara* and other distinctive characteristics of India's temple, cave and secular architecture, the international centre of learning at Nalanda flourished. In such an age, when life seems to have been lived to its utmost, it is but natural that the curve of India's adventure should go further down in its circular movement reaching a region in which it found itself in touch with the material basis of life. Here the mind of India was seeking to infuse its light of the Spirit into the materialised vitality of man, and was trying to have an insight into the truth of matter. Thus behind these activities of life, the old spirituality of the race reigned to keep burning the lamp of its soul. And the most vivid expression of it is found in the works of art of this period which exhibit a marvellous blending

of the two main tendencies of the Indian mind, its love of life based on an understanding of its varied motivations, and its quest of God, the Spirit, the Self of things with life as the condition and instrument of its manifestation. The art-creations of this age are striking examples of the peculiar aesthetic bent of India defining itself in the effort of the artist to suggest through the form his inner experiences rather than any external idea of the things seen by him. The artists were to go through a course of spiritual discipline and were in many instances known as *silpi-yogins*. But they did not confine themselves to the depicting of the sacred subjects only. The secular scenes at Ajanta and Bagh, done by monk-artists, show the accuracy of their knowledge of earthly life ; yet the figures of women in them in the peculiar *tribhanga* (the triple bend) pose indicate a wonderful harmony between such contrary feelings as non-chalance and voluptuousness, both losing themselves in an utter spirit of self-surrender that has surely about it something beyond the concerns of the earth. But the most remarkable are the figures of the *Bodhisattvas* and the Dhyāni Buddha. The former represent a marvellous blending of the feeling of detachment from the outer world and the feeling of an infinite compassion for suffering creatures ; the latter symbolise the greatest ideal which Indian sculpture ever attempted to express, the conception, as intimated by the figure, being the communion of the individual with the Universal Soul in a mood of utter calm yet filled in the being with a power that is more than human.

The spiritual seeking of India took a particular turn about the close of this period when a movement is perceived towards preparing the country for a greater age in which her gains through the cultivation and development of her moral, intellectual and material powers in the previous times would be all equally harmonised and made real in the world of the spirit. To all appearances Shankara did show the promise of being a precursor of that great age in India. But he had not the complete vision, the whole view, of the larger integral ideal of ancient India of which the supreme truth was a harmony between life and spirit, a mediation between earth and heaven. Shankara mistook the materialistic character of the culture of the period for a tendency towards deterioration ; neither was he able to visualise the past history of India from a wider perspective. May be, disgusted with certain aberrations in the religious life of the people, he sought release into the realm of the Spirit, leaving the impure life bound to more impure matter to run

for ever the vicious round of its earthly existence. He affirmed the impermanence of life, and tried to substantiate this pessimistic view in the light of his own one-sided interpretation of the ancient scriptures. *Moksha*, liberation from the bondage of life, he preached with all the vehemence he could command, and his success meant the failure of the country to grow in readiness for the greater future that had been the underlying intention of all its past endeavours. Though supreme in his own way, Shankara proved himself unequal to the task that was before him of furthering the cause of the country towards the fulfilment of its highest destiny. Rather, his negative philosophy contributed, however indirectly, to the strengthening of the forces of disintegration that had been at work in the country during the post-classical age and a foreign invasion destroyed whatever possibility there was of a new awakening. It must however be conceded to Shankara that his efforts were responsible for one and a great good. If his denunciation of life emasculated the manhood of the race, as before him the similar teaching of the Buddha had done, his emphasis, however exclusive, on the absolute aspect of the One Reality, helped to keep alive in the race its native impulse towards the heights of the Spirit.

#### IV

But these strivings and the consequent preparedness of the country for a new turn in its life did not all go in vain. Nurtured by the country's age-old spirituality they flowered into a vigorous revival of the self-same tendency that expressed itself so remarkably in the teachings of the mystics, in the Vaishnavite movements and in the cults of the Tantras. The medieval saints proclaimed that truth is greater than religion, of which the forms also are one in the very core of their teachings. They affirmed to the people, irrespective of caste, creed or race, that life was a necessary condition for man's growth into a greater life for which an absolute concordance between his inner and outer existence was indispensable. And mystical experience by living inwards and through the fervency of devotion was, according to them, the only way by which that harmony could be discovered. This as well as the Vaishnavic and the Tantric cults had all of them their roots in the past. The Upanishadic origin of Vaishnavism and Tantrikism is now established beyond

doubt, though there is an opinion that their genesis may be traced to even earlier dates. Through its intimate contact with the forces of life during the classical age the country became conscious of newer possibilities that were considered realisable by man if he could accept the whole of himself including his vital and sensuous natures as the field of his spiritual pursuits. And both of these cults restarted in the post-classical age with this refreshing and wider outlook. Vaishnavism received a great impetus during the classical age, especially during the Gupta period when its main scriptures, the Bhagavata and the epics, underwent the redaction into their present forms. Through these powerful literary influences the Vaishnavism of the North spread to the South where it took a more intellectual form but was equally, if not more, productive in the cultural life of the people which expressed itself amazingly in a vast literature and in the arts, particularly in the gorgeous massiveness of its architecture in which the creative soul poured out the whole of its wealth, all inspired by and articulating an outburst of *bhakti*. The heyday of Vaishnavism, however, is witnessed in the life and teachings of Sri Chaitanya of Bengal. Here the aim was to sublimate the vital impulses of man through the intensity of devotion into an absolute adoration of the Divine. But it could not go beyond an inner psychic experience turned towards the inner Divine, and whenever a greater externalisation was attempted we know what happened, vitalistic deterioration, corruption and eventual decay. Besides, an entirely spiritual integration was not possible in Vaishnavism in which man sought an eternal nearness to the Divine in His world of Light and not an absolute immergence in Him which was a conception of later Vedanta. Nevertheless, it was the heart here that received the light and found its fruition ; and the curve of India's destiny, though yet bound to the levels of the earth, had, it seems, begun to look towards heaven dreaming of the eternal Brindāvan and of its establishment in terrestrial life as the consummation of man's spiritual endeavour.

In a sense Tantrikism may be said to have made a nearer approach to the ideal towards which the soul of India has been moving throughout her history. It also is a remarkable flowering of the Indian spirit and another indication of the spiritual renaissance that was to have dawned as the crowning fruit of the creative efforts of India terminating with the classical age during which Tantrikism was another dominant cult, and many of its scriptures including the *Chandi*, the quintessence of Tantric

thought, were written in Bengal. Tantrikism sought to raise the whole man into the divine perfectibility, as envisaged in the Veda. Regarding life as the cosmic play of the Divine, it posits that there is a purpose in the play which is possible of fulfilment only in man, who alone of creations has the unique privilege of awakening to the power of Consciousness latent in him as also in everything else which is precluded from that prerogative. Man is a microcosm by himself having in him all the forces which in their action and inter-action constitute the cosmic phenomenon. And when that potential power sleeping at the base of his physical system is roused, it proceeds upward through the centres or planes of the above forces rendering them dynamic with its own power, so much so that they converge in all their new-found strength on the realisation by him of a state in which he possesses and becomes possessed by a higher consciousness. This ascending urge in man represents his evolutionary possibility, the secret aspiration of his soul towards liberation into a greater life; and when stirred into activity by man becoming conscious of it and responding to its impulsion, it rises up and establishes a free contact between the lower and higher worlds, since the planes through which it passes govern all the centres of his being, physical, vital, emotional, mental and higher mental, and yet higher ones. The *sādhana* here is more synthetic, but an absolute self-surrender to the Will of Mahamaya, the Shakti, is imperatively necessary. Like the Upanishads the Tantras also aim at Transcendence, although their idea of Shakti has been generally understood to mean *Prakriti*, the Will-in-Power executive in the universe, who instead of being a Power of Chit, Consciousness or *Purusha*, is herself the controller of Purusha or Shiva. Thus, it is a cosmic force whose invocation by the seeker for ascent into higher states usually results in a widening of his consciousness, in the rise in him of luminous powers, that are often the experiences in the intermediate stages, before the Transcendent is reached in which Purusha and Prakriti are one in the supreme Brahman. The Tantriks started with life and tried to delve deeper into its secret so as to find its unity with the Spirit. They had the vision of the Light but what they were able to bring down into life was not the creative light of the Consciousness-Force—the supreme dynamic source of harmony and perfection—but an aspect of it through the universal force of Nature, which illumined their being but did not, as indeed it could not, transform its parts. Hence their highest aim, except in rare instances, remained far from being completely



realised. "And in the end, as is the general tendency of Prakriti, Tantric discipline lost its principle in its machinery and became a theme of formulae and occult mechanism still powerful when rightly used but fallen from the clarity of their original intention." Nevertheless it is the most daring of spiritual experiments ever undertaken by mankind, and its practice produced a rich harvest of psychological experience about almost every part and plane of man's being, so much so that a conception of their integrality and wholeness was felt to be a necessity in the later spiritual endeavours of the race.

The spiritual mind of India derives not a little of its synthetic cast from the culture of the Tantras. Bengal, the earliest to take it up, developed it by going through every aspect of its discipline and achieved a success almost unique in her religious history. It contributed very largely to her remarkable creative activities in the realm of art and learning, which are witnessed more particularly during the Pala period when Mahayana Buddhism was prevailing in the country only as another name for Tantrikism. Throughout her history Bengal may be said to have grown in her consciousness of Shakti, which is believed to be a chief source of inspiration of many of her fruitful cultural efforts. And it would not be entirely incorrect to say that even in modern times the cultural and religious movements in Bengal have many of them had distinctive elements of Tantric idealism as their guiding motivation. It is in them as well as in what has been done before in the same direction that the meaning is to be sought of the tendencies of the race and of the possibilities of their fulfilment in the future. In the days of the decline when every thing seemed discouraging for a renewal of the country's destiny, it was the Tantric thought, no less than the practice of its cults, that kept alive the fire of the nation's soul, and when the opportune moment came we find it leaping up into a flaming aspiration towards the Light, as seen by the Ancient Fathers. At this momentous period the curve of India's destiny, for the first time since it began, shows signs of an upward movement. It seems to have caught a very faint glimpse of the same kind of light as it had started from, but it is now at an opposite direction towards which the curve is moving in a semi-circle. Tantrikism, combining as it does different means and methods of man's inner striving, re-kindled in the being of the race all its past seekings and helped to canalise them towards the fulfilment of its highest spiritual destiny. If it could not fulfil its great aim in the long period of its influence

and popularity for reasons already stated, it must at least be given the credit of having conduced to a great degree the readiness of the country for the perfection that is to come to it in the future.

## V

But the Tantras were not the only source from which the inspiration was drawn for the re-building of India in modern times. The earliest movement started in the last century looked to Vedantā and in the light of its teachings affirmed its ideal although its inaugurator, it may be noted, had himself Tantrik inclinations. This great soul was the first in modern India to have turned his eyes, as also the eyes of his countrymen, from the glamour of foreign ideals that were then slavishly imitated, towards all that was glorious in their own past. That he and those who followed him did have a glimpse of its truth is testified to in the attempts that one after another were made to recover the spirit of ancient India stripped of its old forms, so that the values of spirituality might once again unfold themselves to the people and pervade their life as they had done in the past. It is not difficult to recognise in this impulse, old but born anew, a definite urge to reassert that a spiritual living can only be the true foundation for the new life of the race. We find this renascent spirit defining itself in almost every form of the cultural and religious activity of the time in which the contribution of Vaishnavism is not negligible. Its literature, poetry and art reflected this new idealism. The political endeavours, too, of the period were not a little inspired by it, by the vision of India the Mother, and their inner motive was always to rehabilitate her intrinsic, therefore spiritual, greatness which, they believed, was possible only in an atmosphere of freedom. It is true that an ascetic tendency is perceptible in the aim of the more recent of the religious movements, but a deeper insight into the lives and teachings of the two great personalities, associated with it, reveals that they represented the resurgent soul of the race, that they were greater beyond measure than the work that stands in their names, and that behind every thing they did was the most stupendous of constructive work ever undertaken in India. A child of the Mother, Śrī Rāmakrishna possessed 'a colossal spiritual capacity' by which he mastered in an incredibly short time the truths, himself having practised them,

of every religion and of every form of spiritual discipline, and 'drove straight to the divine realisation, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence'. His was a finger of light that pointed India onward on the age-old path of the Spirit, by which only, as he and his great disciple repeated again and again, could she arrive at the goal assigned to her by the Dispenser of her destiny. But Sri Rāmakrishna's was an inner realisation of the inner Divine. And life was to him a necessary field for that ; but his extreme emphasis on the Spirit focussed all attention on it with the result that the integral vision could not be always there and its fulfilment was still further away. Nevertheless Dakshineswar was the beginning of the Mother's work which Vivekānanda was commanded by his Master to accomplish, leaving aside his *samādhi* and trance. It was here that the past spiritual experiences of the race were re-lived and the initial lines of their application indicated so that the country by following them might grow in readiness for the completion of that work in the future.

Among the immediate forces that brought about the awakening in modern India one was largely due to the impact upon her of Western pragmatism that urged her, first, to have a clear understanding of the problem and then to find out whatever help the people were yet capable of rendering towards its solution. Religion was certainly an important element in her greatness in the past. And it was then a thing of experience. But being anchored on a fixed social system it could not grow with time so as to be able to satisfy the deepest spiritual aspirations of man, and showed a tendency towards externalism which in the days of decline became so dominant that any enlarging of it or a revival of its true spirit seemed impossible. Religion in India more than in any other country tried to take hold of man's parts of life and draw them Godwards, and thereby to reconcile the spiritual Truth with the vital and material existence. But it could not keep to this high aim all through. Instead of making Earth obedient to Heaven, it had the opposite result of making Heaven a sanction for Earth's desires ; for, continually the religious idea has been turned into an excuse for the worship and service of the human ego. Thus, leaving constantly its little shining core of spiritual experience Religion everywhere has lost itself in the obscure mass of its ever-extending ambiguous compromises with life. It has even gone so far as to divide the higher expressions of man, such as knowledge, works, art and even life itself into two opposite categories, spiritual and

worldly, religious and mundane, sacred and profane, proving thereby its inability to fulfil the need that is being felt today of a larger opening of the soul into the Light, an opening through which the expanding mind, life and heart of man can follow. This failure of religion to be of any real use to man in his spiritual seeking is today ground enough for him to depend on it no longer, and to seek the guidance elsewhere, in the very depth of his being. And as he grows in his quest, the problem becomes more and more clear to him that his life acquires its intrinsic meaning only when it finds its harmony with the Spirit, and it is in the Spirit alone that lies the secret of a spiritual dynamism that will take into itself every thing that life means and illumine it by the light of the Spirit. There is no gainsaying the fact that this is the dawn fire of a new age for mankind, an age of subjectivism, whose promise in India was shown by the efforts that began to be made about the close of the last century, indicating that the race is yet capable of giving a good account of its old capacity for inward pursuits which brought to it this much-needed experience. But the far deeper truth about it is the seeing today of the integral vision by the Master-Seer of the race who also shows the Path that would lead to its realisation in the collective life of humanity.

## VI

What, then, is that vision? It is the vision of a dynamic divine Truth which is descending into the earth to create a new Truth Consciousness and by it to divinise life. The call of the Spirit was responded to in the past by going straight from the mind into the absolute Divine, regarding all dynamic existence as Ignorance, Illusion or *Lilā*. The fundamental error in it may be traced to the incompleteness of the vision which in the Vedānta was that of the Transcendence wherefrom was derived the partial conception of the colourless Spirit, barren of the creative force of Sachchidananda, and which in the Tantras, was that of a cosmic aspect of the supreme Shakti necessitating the modification of her light and power so that they may be received and assimilated by the inferior nature of mind, life and body. But these were no solution of the problem. If complete spiritualisation of life is the aim, these instruments also must undergo a total conversion for which the plenary power and light of the Parā-Prakriti, the Supernature, is necessary.

Thus, while the Vedantin took his flight up into the regions of the Absolute, the Tantrik brought down whatever power he possessed in his ascent and used it to perfect his parts of nature, but the wholeness of the perfection did not come, because his realisation was not of the highest kind, which only could accomplish it. Yet in the Yoga of the Upanishads and to some extent in that of the Tantras, this ascension meant a definite widening of the consciousness, an enlarging of it into the higher reaches of truth, light and ānanda. But what was not there was the integration, the unification of all into a whole. The highest range of consciousness beyond mind, so far attained after the Upanishadic period, is the Overmind in which every power and aspect of the Divine Reality has its own independent action, its separate existence, so that a complete conception of them as integrally one in the indivisible all-comprehending Unity could not be had. There is in it the Light, but its diffused splendour dazzles the seeker so much that he feels contented with it; and the brilliant golden lid of its world veils the face of the greater Truth from his sight. There is also the Oneness, but it is in the background and when its vision is available it appears as that of a Oneness splitting into a teeming multiplicity of forms, and the seeker goes off to be absorbed in the One without caring to understand the truth of the Many. Tantrikism and Vaishnavism accepted the Many as the *Līlā* of the Divine, but it was to them the cosmic play and not the manifestation of the one Reality. The discovery of unity and harmony between these apparent irreconcilables has not therefore been practicable and remained for ever an object of striving for man throughout his history. The Vedic seers had a glimpse of it, as also the early Upanishadic mystics, but in the later ages when intuition gradually gave way to reason, the vision became dimmed, and whatever attempt was made by the mind proved unsuccessful. But the evolutionary Nature has all the time been active in preparing man for his ultimate destiny. In India, who is to be the leader of human evolution, this work takes a definite form, and an outline of it, traced above, may indicate the inherent trend of her endeavours towards the goal. Her recognition of the sovereignty of the Spirit above everything else has given India much of what she needs for her growth towards the Light. But she needs more. Perfect knowledge, or whole knowledge is not possible even in the Overmental consciousness. It has not that integrality which alone can explain creation, and being the first parent of

the Ignorance, it is beyond it to bring about the perfection of the earthly existence.

What, then, is the solution? Is spiritual perfection of the race always to remain a chimera, a dream? and approaches to it, if ever possible, to be limited to individuals only attaining to particular ranges of consciousness, and the divine destiny of man to continue to remain unrealised as ever? Sri Aurobindo says that there *is* a solution, and that conditions in life and nature are not only pointing to but also pressing for it. To him has come the vision of that dynamic Truth of Divine Reality, called by him the Supermind, whose descent into the earth-nature is as inevitable, he says, as was the descent of mind and other powers before it. And the ascent too of the earth into this new power is equally a certainty. If the perfect unfolding of the Spirit is the hidden truth of man's manhood, then man the mental being, bound to the Ignorance and imperfection, cannot of course be the last word in the evolutionary endeavour of Nature. Evolution, says Sri Aurobindo, presupposes a process of involution. The Spirit descended into Matter and created in it the urge towards a great expression, and Life emerged, and in the same way did Mind. In man the urge becomes more insistent taking the form of a definitive aspiration for the spiritual living which only can liberate him from his bondage to the Ignorance and imperfection. But it is no amount of readiness on his part that can effect this change in him, though it is a necessary condition for it. The Supermind alone can do it. The evolution of man into the Light and Truth of this creative power of the Divine would mean its coming down into the earth consciousness and becoming dynamic in it by quickening its own Force involved in it, even as the powers of Life and Mind became active in the earth through their impact on their own principles involved in it. Evolution is not a mere ascent of a part of our being from one grade to a higher till the highest is reached, in which case the uplift of the whole being would never be possible. The spiritual growth of man stops short of its fundamental aim in that the higher light that his upward endeavour brings to him touches and sublimates that particular part of his being by which he makes that effort, as mind in the case of the Vedantin, heart in that of the Vaishnava, and the higher vital and the life-parts of nature in that of the Tantrik; but the *entire being* has never had the benefit of the light. Evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not only an ascent but also a descent making for a transformation and integration

of the whole nature, and evolution into the highest plane would mean the change and uplift of all the lower stages. The integrating ascent to the Supermind would therefore bring about a total conversion of the *whole being*,—the new Truth sending its light to the remotest corners of the being. "This illumination and change will take up and recreate the whole being, mind, life and body; it will be not only an inner experience of the Divinity, but a remoulding of both the inner and outer existence by its power." Not only this, but "it will take form not only in the life of the individual but as a collective life of gnostic being established as a highest power and form of the becoming of the Spirit in the earth nature". This is the integral vision towards the fulfilment of which in the life of the race India is to lead mankind, and discharge thereby the mission assigned to her by God. Every endeavour in the past was a preparation for it; and the time has now come for her to reveal this truth to humanity and show the way by which it can be realised. And when this integral evolution will be accomplished in the life of man, divinised and new-created by the dynamis of this new Light from heaven all the highest aspirations of the race, its deepest strivings towards perfection will have been fulfilled; all its golden dreams of the kingdom of God on earth, its sublimest visions of the intrinsic divinity of man will have become a unique reality. And the curve of India's destiny, full of a colourful plethora of rich experiences gathered throughout the ages, finds itself terminated at the end of the semi-circle, the other end being at the Vedic age from where it started. And it becomes a complete circle, because the Seer of to-day meets the Seer of the Veda in the luminous world of the Supermind above. Thus does India deliver her message to humanity and fulfil the purpose of evolutionary Nature. But the Seer to-day is also the Leader of the Way. The call therefore goes forth from him re-echoing the ancient *rik*:—

"Arise, O Souls, arise! Strength has come,  
Darkness has passed away—the Light is arriving!"

A full idea of the Supermind and of the consequences of its activation in the earth consciousness is not possible mentally to have, far less to express. And for whatever of it is available it is better that one should go to the Master himself who has given to it a magnificent expression in his recently published *magnum*

*opus, The Life Divine.* The Supermind is a link between Sachchidananda and the lower hemisphere of creation. A creative consciousness with Unity as the constant basis, it creates, governs and upholds the worlds; and being the nature of Sachchidananda itself it creates nothing which is not in its own existence. Its truth is inherent in all cosmic force and manifestation. In it the Light is one with the Force; and being, consciousness and will are the three indivisible and harmonious aspects of a single movement. "To its self-awareness the whole existence is an equable extension, one in oneness, one in multiplicity, one in all conditions and everywhere. Here the All and the One are the same existence; the individual being does not and cannot lose the consciousness of its identity with all beings and with the One Being; for that identity is inherent in supramental cognition, a part of the supramental self-evidence." The truth of Transcendence and the truth of Manifestation are one in it, and therefore also the truths of the Spirit, Life and Matter. In the Supermind exists the true principle of eternal harmony; and when man will be in possession of its Gnosis he will discover that harmony and find in it the permanent solution of all his problems. From his present subjection to the obscure workings of the Ignorance in nature he will then be liberated into the freedom of the Spirit, into the infinite light of the supreme Knowledge. He will then live and always in the supramental consciousness of the self-existent Truth, of its dynamic and creative power, the Conscious Force, which is the Parā Prakriti, the Supernature, of whose Will his life will be a perfect manifestation, of whose heavenly splendour the whole terrestrial existence will be a luminous revelation. It is to this Mahashakti, the Divine Mother, that man must open, and consecrate himself wholly and entirely so that by her Grace he might be made ready for the descent into him of her new Light from above; for the Supermind is her Light, her Force. "This supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth consciousness; for its upward ascent is not ended and mind is not its last summit. But that the change may arrive, take form and endure, there is needed the call from below with a will to recognise and not deny the Light when it comes, and there is needed the sanction of the Supreme from above. The power that mediates between the sanction and the call is the presence and power of the Divine Mother. The Mother's power and not any human endeavour and *tapasya* can alone



rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering Truth and Light and Life divine and the immortal's Ananda."\*

\* Based on Sri Aurobindo's writings and letters to his disciples including the following books and articles :—*Essays on the Gita*, *Isha Upanishad*, *Kalidasa*, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, *The Life Divine*, *The Mother*, *The Renaissance in India*, *The Riddle of this World*, *A Defence of Indian Culture*, *The Hymns of the Atris*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*. The last four are titles of articles that serially appeared in the "Arya" (now defunct). The quotations in the article are all of them from the above books and articles.

# Sri Aurobindo and Absolutism

BY PROF. HARIDAS CHAUDHURI, M.A.

By Absolutism I mean the metaphysical theory which envisages reality as a unitary, self-coherent and all-comprehensive whole. The universe in its ultimate nature is conceived by Absolutism as an integrated unity which is all-containing and all-originating, and not as a mere conjunction of self-contained units nor as a concatenated series of both conjunctions and disjunctions or of continuities and discontinuities. In other words, ultimate reality is conceived here as an Absolute which embraces all relations within itself and yet completely transcends them, and not as a plurality of independent reals standing in diverse relations to one another.

Now, this Absolute may be conceived in various ways,—it may be conceived as a physical, a vital, a logical or a mystical or spiritual Absolute. Prof. Alexander in his "Space, Time and Deity" gives us an idea of the physical Absolute. The Universe in its simplest and original expression is, in his opinion, the all-encompassing Space-Time which is regarded as the matrix of all empirical existence and the nurse of all becoming. The process of evolution brings to birth a successive series of such empirical qualities as materiality, vitality, mentality etc., but all these qualities come to qualify only different configurations of Space-Time. Henri Bergson gives us a vital Absolute in his conception of the *élan vital* or the vital impetus which is an eternally creative principle continually leading to unique unforeseen and unforeseeable forms. Hegel elaborates the notion of a logical Absolute which is a self-distinguishing and self-objectifying principle of self-consciousness, the world of our experience being the fulfilment of the dialectical necessity of its nature. In the systems of Bradley and Sankara we have the vision of a mystical Absolute which is a supra-rational undifferentiated unity and which by its ineffable nature completely transcends the highest reach of the understanding. There is, without doubt, a very close affinity between Sri Aurobindo's position and this mystical type of Absolutism, but still, having regard to the immense difference that readily leaps to the eye,

we cannot accept the expression as quite adequate for the purpose of characterisation. The Absolute or Brahman as conceived by Sri Aurobindo has undoubtedly a mystical side *i.e.*, a transcendental aspect of being in which It is wholly incomprehensible to all logical thinking and is thus, to borrow a phrase from Rudolf Otto, a "Numinous Entity". But then the transcendental aspect is only one of the different poises of being of the Absolute. In another poise of its being, the Absolute functions as the all-sustaining universal principle; and both these poises and aspects are equally real and eternal. The Absolute as the Universal principle is again manifested on different planes in different forms; on the physical plane Brahman is manifested as the universal spatio-temporal scheme or as Cosmic Matter, on the vital plane He is manifested as Cosmic Life-Force, and on the mental plane He is manifested as Cosmic Mind or as Absolute Idea. So we find that whatever elements of truth are there in the physical, vital, logical and mystical types of absolutism are accepted and harmoniously fitted together in the Synthetic or Integral Idealism of Sri Aurobindo.

Absolutism is perfectly right in regarding ultimate reality as one unitary, all-embracing whole and in tracing all the diversities of empirical existence to that absolute principle. But the formidable problem which every form of absolutism has got to face is the problem of determining the nature of the Absolute in a way which can best secure for Man and Nature their proper status and function in the structure of reality. We will consider here the view of Integral Idealism with regard to the nature of the Absolute, the significance of the World and the value of the Individual Self in the light of some representative theories concerning these ultimate issues.

### THE NATURE OF THE ABSOLUTE

The very first question which often presents itself while discussing the nature of the Absolute is: Is not the Absolute after all a mere object of inference and, as such, a hypothetical entity? Is not the Infinite only a negative idea resulting from the incapacity of our mind to conceive of any definite limit to the spatio-temporal scheme to which we belong? The Unlimited appears indeed to be incapable of being supposed, by any stretch of imagination, to be an object of immediate experience of our finite mind. But this doubt concerning the reality of the Absolute cannot bear deeper reflection. The

Infinite is in truth the very presupposition of our knowledge of the finite and the limited. We know the finite as finite only because we have in our mind a positive notion of the Infinite (to which the finite is relative), however vague and inarticulate that notion might be, just as we can know darkness as darkness only because we have positive experience of light. The Absolute is not indeed an idea which we manufacture with a view to imparting some additional dignity and glory to our knowledge and experience ; it is rather organic to the very structure of our intelligence. We fail to understand the world of experience if we do not apply the notion of the Infinite. The relative world stands self-condemned and betrays internal self-discrepancies until it is exhibited as rooted in the Absolute and as a manifestation thereof. In our search after Truth we have to pass on from the world to God, from the finite to the Infinite, not because the former is, but because the former is not, *i.e.*, because the former cannot be comprehended except with reference to the latter. (See Pringle Pattison's 'Idea of God', p. 250).

But there are some philosophers who, having admitted that the notion of the Absolute is a positive notion and is the presupposition of our Knowledge of the relative world, declare that this Absolute is, at any rate, entirely unknown and unknowable. We are aware only of the "that" of the Absolute but not of its "what". We are constrained to believe that the Absolute exists, but we have no means at our disposal to know what its positive nature is. We obtain all our knowledge by means of comparison, assimilation and discrimination. Now these psychological processes when applied to the Infinite would at once reduce it into a finite and relative object, so that the process of knowing the Infinite may be said to involve a finitisation of the Infinite. Now, even though it may be admitted that there is an element of truth in Agnosticism, still it is absurd to suggest that the nature of the Absolute is a perfectly sealed book for us. The Absolute may be inexhaustible and unfathomable, but It is surely not completely inaccessible to our experience. Had the Absolute been really unknowable, it would have been a mere abstraction of our thought and not a concrete reality. We can affirm the reality of a thing only in so far as we have an inkling into its nature. "That" can hardly be separated from "what" ; existence stripped of all positive content necessarily passes over into non-existence which, taken in an absolute sense, is a word without signification.

The Agnostic's conception of the Absolute as an Unknown and Unknowable Power or as an indeterminate  $x$  which functions as the ground and source of all empirical existence is then a self-contradictory idea. So let us proceed to consider some representative theories which give us a more or less definite conception of the Absolute and make it continuous with human experience. In recent times Prof. Alexander has elaborated the notion of the physical Absolute. His Absolute is Space-Time conceived as an infinite and continuous whole of which Space may be described as the body and Time may be described as the soul and which is impregnated from the beginning with a creative *nisus*. Space and time are not the forms of any primordial stuff of existence such as matter; Space-Time is rather itself the fundamental stuff of all existence. Materiality, vitality, mentality, spirituality etc., are a series of unique and unforeseeable qualities which appear on the scene of empirical reality in the course of evolution and are stabilised as the properties of different complexes of motion which are differentiated within the one all-comprehensive system of motion that Space-Time is. When the elements of space-time attain to a certain degree of complexity of structure and function, the novel quality of materiality emerges into being, qualifies the spatio-temporal complexes and gives rise to what we call material objects. In a similar way, living beings, animals, men appear at later stages in the course of evolution with the emergence of the higher empirical qualities. The main difficulty confronting such a theory of emergent evolution is that it has to admit at every stage of evolution a complete miracle. If the Absolute be bare Space-Time empty of all the infinite wealth of content which belongs to our experience, what is the source of the qualities which we experience? Since the process of evolution prepares only the basis which is fit to bear some higher quality, whence do the higher qualities themselves come, if they are not somehow or other latent from the beginning in the Absolute?

The same criticism applies to Bergson's theory of Vital Absolute which is an inexhaustible principle of absolutely free creation. While Alexander starts with Space-Time conceived as an all-comprehensive system of motion, Bergson starts with pure Time freed from all spatial images and conceived as pure duration, pure change, pure evolution. While Alexander starts with a physical principle which leads to the birth of all empirical qualities such as matter, life, mind within itself, Bergson starts with a biological principle, a vital urge, and reduces static

matter to an illusion of the intellect and the intellect to a pragmatic function or an instrument of practical life. Space supplies whatever amount of stability, continuity, orderliness and determinateness is there in Alexander's Absolute, but Bergson's pure Time is absolutely free and undetermined—determined neither mechanistically nor teleologically, neither by the past nor by the future—in its continual act of bringing to birth ever unforeseen and unforeseeable forms. Bergson's *élan vital* is a richer principle than Alexander's Space-Time which is a greater abstraction, but still it is not rich enough to contain and create the higher forms which we know. The ultimate principle must be conceived at least in terms of the highest that we experience, if not as ineffably higher than the highest. Both Alexander and Bergson believe in the emergence of the higher out of the lower, which is a manifest absurdity. Evolution of that which was non-existent before is as fantastic as the doctrine of creation out of nothing. Change, becoming, genuine development is indeed an indisputable fact of our experience, but then this is without doubt a fact *within* the universe, and not the supreme Fact of the universe,—evolution is only an aspect of reality and not the essence of reality. Permanence and change, stability and mobility, eternity and the temporal flux are both true aspects of the Real. Reality in itself is unchangeable and eternally accomplished; infinitely diverse changes are an expression of the overflowing joy of the eternally Perfect. The emergence of the qualitative differences which characterises the process of evolution is the manifestation of the highest in different conditions peculiar to the different levels of existence. The Absolute is neither Matter nor Life nor Mind; it transcends them all and at the same time contains within itself the truth and essence of them all; and it is also manifested at different levels as Matter, as Life, as Mind for the diversified expression of its infinite joy.

The physical and biological categories are then too inadequate and poor for the purpose of describing ultimate reality. They should be restricted in their application to circumscribed spheres of experience. But, what about the mental? Can Mind be equated with Reality? There are philosophers who have discovered their master-key in this or that element of the mind which is the highest power of consciousness hitherto manifested and overtly operative on earth. Schopenhauer fastens upon Will and erects it into the ultimate principle. The world is, in its essence, so thinks Schopenhauer, a vast omni-

potent Will ; it is at a much later stage that this Will in the course of its gradual self-objectification attains to reason or self-consciousness. Hegel, on the other hand, considers self-consciousness to be the highest category and holds that all other lower categories including matter, life, volition, emotion etc., are embraced and reconciled within the organic structure of the all-inclusive self-consciousness or Absolute Idea. The chief merit of Hegel's view lies in making reality a spiritual unity of the One and the Many,—a self-distinguishing principle of self-consciousness which by the dialectical necessity of its own nature manifests itself into the world of plurality. But Hegel's Absolute Idea is too much of an abstract logical scheme and as such it fails to satisfy the deepest craving of the human heart. Mystics therefore maintain that the highest reality is neither an omnipotent Will nor a self-differentiating Idea ; it is absolute Love, pure, ineffable, indescribable Bliss. The philosophy which turns a blind eye to the mystical experience that discloses reality as pure love and unutterable joy in which all differentiation vanishes is, to say the least, one-sided and imperfect. But is not the mystical conception of reality as pure love another one-sided and imperfect position in philosophy?

It is indeed wrong to equate reality with any particular factor of mental life, whether it be will or thought or emotion and to relegate others to a subordinate position. Attempts have therefore been made to envisage reality as a harmonious unity of all the elements of mentality. Josiah Royce holds that the Absolute is the absolute Unity of Experience, Thought and Will or Love. He defines reality as the immediate fulfilment of a system of ideas in a unique way. Reality is, first of all, absolute Thought or an absolute system of ideas ; but it is also absolute Experience in so far as it is the immediate fulfilment of all its ideas and not a mere abstract conceptual structure ; and further, reality is also Will or Love in so far as its ideas are fulfilled in a unique way in consequence of which its experience is incapable of multiple exemplification. The Absolute is not then, according to Royce, either Will or Thought or Feeling or Love,—it is not exclusively one of them erected into the ultimate ; it is the absolute unity of all these factors harmoniously fitted together. The Absolute is an infinite unity in so far as it is an endlessly self-differentiating structure ; individual selves are the images or representations of the Absolute which is a self-imagining or self-representative whole.

It is indeed an achievement to conceive of the Absolute as

the self-coherent unity of all the factors of mental life, but both critical reflection and deep spiritual experience feel constrained to go further beyond such a differentiated harmony. Bradley and Bosanquet contend that the Absolute can by no means be equated with an intelligible expression or an intellectual scheme of terms and relations. Every relational structure is, as they point out, shot through and through with internal logical contractions and as such it must be an imperfect and self-contradictory manifestation of some inclusive non-relational experience. Thought, Feeling, Will, etc., are no doubt harmonised and unified in the Absolute, but in being so harmonised they must lose their distinctive character and along with other determinate contents of our experience must be transformed into one Supreme Immediacy. The Absolute cannot be the relational unity of differentiated elements, because whenever there is the relational way of thinking there is only appearance and unreality infected by a mass of self-discrepancies, relations being incapable of conferring genuine unity or of supplying any effective principle of togetherness. So Bradley describes the Absolute as the all-inclusive supra-relational Experience which embraces all the distinguishable factors of our knowledge and also transcends them, transfiguring them all into an incomprehensible synthesis by means of such transcendence. When Bradley describes the Absolute as Experience, he does not mean by the word our sentient experience or our immediate feeling though we have in the latter a close analogue to some important features of the Absolute. The Absolute is Experience in as much as it is one all-comprehensive supra-relational whole which is the immediate unity of all differences and the concrete synthesis of all distinctions. Both our infra-relational sentient experience and relational logical experience are forms of manifestation of Absolute Experience which represents the supreme consummation of all meditation of the immediate.

The views of Bradley and Bosanquet are perhaps the nearest Western approach to the position of such great Eastern mystics as Buddha and Sankara. Lord Buddha says that ultimate reality can best be described as absolute Naught or Silence or as Nirvāna. Now, these words signify not a mere void or an abyss of nothingness. Reality is Naught or Silence only in so far as it outsoars all logical conceptions and transcends the highest categories of finite thought. In truth, it is indescribable bliss and rich in inexhaustible positivity which bursts through all limitations of human speech and of the human



understanding. Reality is Nirvāna in so far as it represents the extinction of all desires and the cessation of all painful existence born of blind attachment to the unreal. Sankara also considers the Absolute to be a supra-logical undifferentiated unity, the world of plurality being entirely relative to *Avidyā* or the logical way of thinking. Sankara differs from Buddha in describing Reality more positively in spiritual terms, though he is all the time aware that all such descriptions or characterisations, are in the last analysis hopelessly inadequate. Sankara's Brahman is Sat-chit-ānanda, i.e., the Unity of absolute Existence, absolute Knowledge and absolute Bliss. It is not the unity of an integrated whole having certain parts or certain attributes. Brahman is not that which *has* i.e., possesses, absolute existence and absolute consciousness and absolute bliss. Nor is Brahman pure existence plus pure consciousness plus pure bliss. Brahman is pure existence which is pure consciousness, and pure consciousness which is pure bliss. In Bradley's opinion, however, the distinctions of thought, will, love, personality, etc., are rooted in real differences in the life of the Absolute ; they all enter into the Absolute as constitutive factors, though in coming together in that unitary self-coherent whole they are transformed beyond recognition into the indefinable and incomprehensible specific experience of the Absolute. According to Sankara, all distinctions including knowledge, will, love, personality, etc., are only shadows or reflections which the unobjective light of self-luminous Brahman throws on the screen of *Avidyā* or Ignorance. So they cannot be said to contribute in any way to the life of the Absolute. While according to Bradley, the distinctions under consideration are the results of the activity of thought working on the basis of real differences present in non-relational experience, in the view of Sankara these distinctions are an illegitimate transference of Ignorance on the locus of the Spirit which is undifferentiated consciousness. For Bradley, thought which is the source of all distinctions is an organ of self-articulation or self-explication of the Absolute which is super-thought ; but for Sankara, Ignorance which projects the distinctions is a logically indefinable power which is neither separate from Brahman, nor inseparable from Brahman nor both. Ignorance is not separate from Brahman because that would make an end of Monism and Absolutism : it is not inseparable from Brahman because that would abrogate the purity of the Absolute ; it cannot be said to be both separate and inseparable, because that would be a violation of the law of contradiction.

The principle of Ignorance is then entirely incomprehensible, but yet, without some comprehension of how it stands related to the Absolute, there is a strong suspicion that we have stopped short of an adequate and integral view of the Absolute. With regard to Bradley's position, it may be asked: What does start thought which is essentially a subdued factor in the life of the Absolute on its career of endlessly differentiating the undifferentiated? What, again, leads the Absolute to fall from its supra-logical height and appear as infra-logical immediate experience which serves as the basis of logical thinking? Without a satisfactory answer to these questions there seems to be no logical right to stick to that particular conception of the Absolute.

A comparative study of the views of Bradley and Śāṅkara takes us straight to the position of Sri Aurobindo. Bradley maintains that the distinguishable elements of our mental life must correspond to certain differences in the structure of ultimate reality, though he does not throw any light on the nature of these differences. Sri Aurobindo holds that the mind with its characteristic functions is an inferior form of manifestation of the Supra-mental Gnosis of the Absolute. The mental functions of thought, will, feeling, sense-experience, etc., are expressions on a lower level of the supramental truth-consciousness, truth-creation, absolute love, absolute sense, etc., which are all embraced in the immediate unity of one vast indivisible Gnosis. Bradley is definitely mistaken in supposing that the Absolute would be indigent with any one of the appearances left out, and that all the distinctions of our life contribute to the perfection of the Absolute. Sri Aurobindo agrees with Śāṅkara that the Absolute is eternally perfect in itself and does not depend for its perfection in any way on the creations of Ignorance or the cosmic Will. But while for Śāṅkara Ignorance is a non-conscious principle of cosmic illusion having no value or significance from the standpoint of Brahman, Sri Aurobindo looks upon it as a certain expression—an exclusive self-concentration—of the consciousness-force of the Absolute or Saccidānanda.

For Śāṅkara ultimate reality is a unity beyond all differences; for Hegel, it is a unity-in-differences; for Bradley, it is a non-relational whole which swallows up and transforms all differences into transfused elements. Sri Aurobindo envisages ultimate reality as an unfathomable mystery of which unity-beyond-diversity and unity-in-diversity, the non-relational purity and the relational playfulness are two equally real aspects of

poises. The Absolute is surely in one of its aspects pure undifferentiated consciousness, *Nirguna Brahman*, but there is no reason why the Absolute should be limited to this aspect only and betray an incapacity for other forms of self-manifestation. While in one poise of being, the Absolute is *Nirguna Brahman*, devoid of all qualities, in another equally real poise, it is revealed as *Saguna Brahman*, possessed of infinite qualities, endlessly self-distinguishing and eternally creating. The Absolute or *Para brahman* is expressed in both these forms—*Nirguna Brahman* and *Saguna Brahman*, unity-beyond-diversity and unity-in-diversity—though it is not exhausted by them whether separately or collectively, and therefore transcends them both as an immeasurable and unfathomable mystery. This mystery is not a blank featureless unity indistinguishable from nothing, but rather an ineffable Plenum which contains an infinite richness of diversity “in a sort of mystical latency”. In this respect *Para brahman* bears a greater resemblance to Bradley’s Absolute than to Śankara’s. But even on this point there is also a tremendous difference. According to Bradley, all our variegated experiences enter into the life of the Absolute, vitally modify its experience and contribute to its harmony. The specific experience of the Absolute derives its peculiar *quale* from all our pleasures and pains, our happiness and misery, our frustrations and maladjustments as well as our successes and triumphs, though in coming together in the Absolute they are all necessarily submerged and fused into one unique transcendent experience. It follows from this that the joy which is in the Absolute is only a balance of pleasure over pain, the luminosity which is in the Absolute is a balance of knowledge over ignorance, and so on and so forth. But the *Para brahman* of Sri Aurobindo contains “in a sort of mystical latency” not all our impure countless experiences, but only the most transcendent powers and the highest forms, or, in other words, the absolutes of all that we experience. For example, *Para brahman* contains within itself absolute creative power, unobstructed dynamic truth-vision, infinite pure joy, absolute over-flowing love, etc. *Avidyā* which spreads its darkness over the entire field of our experience is derived from the divine creative power which is full of infinite potency and infinite knowledge. Our pleasures and pains are the distorted reflections of the divine infinite joy on the dark screen of *avidyā*, our strength and weakness are the imperfect expressions of the divine omnipotence, our truths and errors are the shadows,

cast by *avidyā* on our plane, of the vast truth-consciousness of God, and our virtues and vices are the faint imitations of the self-realising dynamic Will of the eternally Perfect.

The *Para brahman* as experienced and conceived by Sri Aurobindo reconciles all partial views and overrides every species of one-sidedness. *Para brahman* is at once static and dynamic,—a vast silence and an eternal activity; it is at once impersonal and personal, formless and possessed of infinite forms, transcendent and immanent. It is only from the standpoint of dividing mentality or of *avidyā* that these different aspects of the one Reality appear to be irreconcilably opposed to each other. In truth, however, the absolute status of Brahman far from contradicting its creativity rather supports it and prevents it from self-dissipation or self-alienation. This is exemplified in our own experience when we find that the most potent activity or the most eloquent creative word proceeds from the depth of silence of the spirit. When we imagine that the Absolute cannot be both static and dynamic or transcendent and immanent we ignore the infinite capacity of the Absolute and attribute to it the impotence of our own logical way of thinking. Similarly, there is no real opposition between the formlessness of the Absolute and its infinitude of forms, because the Absolute is not formless in the sense of being incapable of assuming forms but rather in the sense that it can by no means be exhausted in any number of forms, however innumerable. The Absolute is both impersonal and personal in two senses. It is personal in so far as it is indivisibly present in every person, and it is impersonal in so far as it is not limited to any person or even to the whole collectivity of persons but rather shines as transcendent Consciousness. Secondly, the Absolute is personal in so far as it is experienced by us as a God having excellent spiritual attributes and ever eager to lift us through infinite mercy into His eternal fellowship or communion, and it is impersonal or rather supra-personal in so far as even the excellent spiritual attributes known to us are inadequate to express the infinite and ineffable essence of the Absolute. Finally, the Absolute is both transcendent and immanent; transcendent in so far as it transcends all creation and cosmic expression, and immanent in so far as it is manifested first as the inmost self of the universe, as its Creator, Governor and Destroyer, and secondly, as the inmost self or the *Antaryāmin* of the individual. This is why Sri Aurobindo is never tired of reminding us that

the transcendent, the universal and the individual are three equally real and eternal terms of existence.

By borrowing a happy phrase of Hegel, we may say that *Parabrahman* is at once eternally self-realised and eternally self-realising. Hegel could not reconcile quite satisfactorily these two equally real aspects of the Absolute. He sought some sort of reconciliation in *Täuschung* or the principle of illusion and had thus to reduce to unreality the dynamic and self-realising aspect of the eternally perfect. It is, according to Hegel, an illusion that we consider Reality to be yet unaccomplished; it is an illusion to think that the absolutely good has to wait upon us and require our co-operation for its self-accomplishment; and it is upon an illusion that our active interest in the world-process reposes. "The consummation of the infinite End, therefore, consists merely in removing the illusion which makes it seem yet unaccomplished . . . . In the course of its process the Idea creates that illusion, by setting an antithesis to confront it; and its action consists in getting rid of the illusion which it has created." (The Logic of Hegel, Wallace's translation, pp. 351-52). This is not so much reconciliation as subordination of one term of the antithesis to the other. Sri Aurobindo holds that the Absolute is eternally self-realising in a far deeper sense of the expression, and that the process of eternal self-realisation is the spontaneous outpouring of the eternally self-realised essence of the Real. Brahman has a creative and dynamic aspect, not because He has in His nature any want to remove or any need to satisfy nor because He has any purpose to fulfil by way of attaining enrichment of being or self-completion. *Parabrahman* in His intrinsic nature is eternally perfect and self-realised, there is not the least doubt about that. But it is precisely because the Supreme is eternally self-realised that He is also eternally self-realising, for, the essence of His eternally self-realised being is infinite overflowing joy. Perfect and sufficient in Himself, He wills to express His infinite joy in infinite ways under infinitely diverse conditions. If we speak of any purpose of creation we should remember that it is not the purpose of self-enrichment, but the purpose of self-revelation,—it is the same as the rhythmic expression of exuberant joy. So it is no principle of illusion which we require to harmonise the static and the dynamic aspects of the Supreme; it is the principle of joy, the *Lila*, which provides the key to the highest riddle of existence.

Thus we see that the Absolute as experienced by Sri Auro-

bindo is a unity having a rich diversity of aspects. Static and dynamic, impersonal and personal, undifferentiated and infinitely self-differentiating—these are the different forms of expression of the same all-embracing Spirit which does not yet get exhausted in these self-manifestations singly or collectively. It transcends all known aspects and is in itself the most ineffable Supreme which is completely beyond the reach of the logical understanding and which even though undifferentiated still contains in a sort of mystical latency an infinite richness of powers and qualities. The creative power of the Supreme which is one with and indistinguishable from the Supreme is what we may call the transcendental Divine Mother. The Supreme is eternally manifested in the transcendental Divine Mother as Saccidānanda or as the Spirit which is pure existence, pure consciousness, pure bliss (The Mother, p. 38). But besides pure existence, pure consciousness and pure bliss there is another constitutive principle of the Absolute which Sri Aurobindo has termed the Supramental Gnosis and which is the same as the vast Truth-consciousness, the *Satyam Ātam V̥hat* of the Vedic Rsis. This Supermind is the perfect identity of knowledge and will and as such functions as the medium of self-manifestation of Saccidānanda through which the latter descends into the diversified world of manifestation. The comprehending consciousness, the apprehending consciousness and the projecting consciousness are the three general poises or functions of the Supermind. The first is the equal self-extension of Saccidānanda which is free from individualisation and which founds the inalienable unity of things. The second modifies that unity so as to support the manifestation of the Many in One and One in Many. It is the self-differentiating activity of Saccidānanda by which He realises Himself as the Universal Divine and the Individual Divine, the former knowing all soul-forms as itself, and the latter envisaging its existence as a soul-form and soul-movement of the One. The third poise further modifies the inalienable unity of things so as to support the evolution of a diversified individuality which, by the action of Ignorance, becomes in us at a lower level the illusion of the separate ego. It produces a sort of fundamental dualism in unity—no longer unity qualified by a subordinate dualism—between the individual Divine and its universal source. (The Life Divine. Vol. I, Chap. XVI, pp. 224-5). The world of plurality to which we belong is enveloped by Ignorance or *Avidyā* which induces us to attribute separate and discontinuous existence to the self-differentiations

of the Absolute. This *Avidyā* is derived through an act of self-veiling from *Māyā* which is a principle of Knowledge-Ignorance and which functions as a transition-link or passage between the higher sphere of pure Knowledge and the lower sphere of Ignorance. *Māyā* in its turn is derived from the Supermind through an act of self-veiling of its projecting consciousness.

It is evident from the foregoing account of Sri Aurobindo's views about the nature of the Absolute and about the principles which lead to its cosmic self-manifestation, that they bear a striking resemblance to the account of ultimate principles as given in the Tantras. According to both the Sāṃkhya and the Sankara-Vedānta, the primordial source and fundamental stuff of the universe is an intrinsically unconscious principle. It is the very opposite of the Chit or pure consciousness. Whatever consciousness we find in the highest modifications of *Prakṛti* or *Māyā* such as the intellect and the mind is only a sort of reflected consciousness (*Chidābhāsa*) which is borrowed from the consciousness of the Spirit. Sri Aurobindo agrees with the Tantra that the *materia prima* of the world is a form of Consciousness itself and that the creative power is the power of Consciousness. Consciousness at rest is *Chit-svarupa* and consciousness in action or in creative dynamism is *Chidrūpini Śakti*, and the two are essentially in undistinguishable union with each other (Sir John Woodroffe's *Shakti and Shakta*, pp. 175-6). According to the Tantra, *Māyā* is derived from the *Chit-Śakti* and the apparently unconscious *Prakṛti* is derived from *Māyā* and her five *kanchukas* or offshoots such as *Kāla* (Time), *Niyati* (Order), *Vidyā* (Knowledge), *Rāga* (Interest), and *Kalā* (Power). Similarly, Sri Aurobindo holds that even the inconscient stuff and basis of the material world is not the complete negation of consciousness but is rather consciousness in a state of self-concealment. Inconscience is only consciousness fallen asleep. *Avidyā* or Ignorance is not, according to Sri Aurobindo, an objective falsehood incompatible with the essence of the Spirit; it is rather "a play of the spirit's own self-manifesting Omniscience" (*The Life Divine*, Vol. II, p. 415); it is some self-absorbed concentration of Tapas, of Consciousness-Force in action on a separate movement of the Force (*Ibid.*, p. 435). This Ignorance is derived through a purposeful act of self-veiling from *Māyā* which Sri Aurobindo calls the Overmind that "covers as with the wide wings of some creative Oversoul this whole lower hemisphere of Knowledge-Ignorance, (and also) links it with the greater Truth-consciousness (of Saccidānanda)". Between the Mind as we know it and the

Overmind, Sri Aurobindo recognises such higher gradations of mentality, as the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind and the Intuition which supply the unbroken thread of continuity.

The Absolute in its highest state has been designated by the Tantra *Parāsamvit* or *Tattvātita*. This corresponds to the ineffable Supreme of Sri Aurobindo in its most transcendental aspect. In between *Māyā* and *Parāsamvit*, the Tantra admits the five suddhatattvas of *Sivā-sakti*, *Sadasiva* or *Sadākhyā*, *Iswara* and *Sadvidyā* or *Suddhavidyā* (*Shakti* and *Shākta*, p. 150). *Sivā-sakti* corresponds to Sri Aurobindo's *Saccidānanda* with His *Saccidānandamayi Sakti* and *Sadāsiva*, *Iswara* and *Sadvidyā* correspond to the triple status of the Supramental Gnosis of *Saccidānanda* such as the comprehending, the apprehending and the projecting consciousness. *Siva* and *Sakti* represent the subjective and the objective poles of consciousness, the *Aham* and the *Idam* in its subtle potentiality, the *Prakāśa* and the *Vimarsa* aspects of the supreme Experience or *Āmarsha*. *Sadāsiva*, *Iswara* and *Suddhavidyā* represent different stages in the increasing self-differentiation of *Sivā-sakti*. In *Sadāsiva* there is the first incipency of the world-experience as the notion "I am this", in which, as in other suddhatattvas, the "this" is experienced as part of the Self and not as separate from it. The emphasis at this stage is on the *Aham* to which the objective element is wholly subordinate. At the next stage, the *Idam* side becomes clear in the *Iswaratattva* in which the emphasis is said to fall on the "this" which the *Aham* subjectifies. The result again of this is the evolved consciousness of *Suddhavidyā tattva* in which the emphasis is equal on "I" and "This". Consciousness is now in the state in which the two halves of experience are ready to be broken up and experienced separately as *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*. In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy also we find that the comprehending, the apprehending and the projecting functions of the Supermind represent different stages in the increasing modification of the fundamental unity of things and the gradual emergence of the Many, even though there are also some important differences between the two views. *Sadākhyā*, *Iswara* and *Sadvidyā* are conceived by the Tantra as the emanations of *Śiva* through the activity of *Śakti*, whereas the Supermind is conceived by Sri Aurobindo as an aspect, power or principle of being of *Saccidānanda*, the three functions of the Supermind being three inseparable movements in the one indivisible movement of the Gnosis.

A more significant difference between Sri Aurobindo and



the Tantra concerns the relation between the highest Reality and its dynamic Power. We know that the Sankara-Vedānta lays dominant stress upon the aspect of Being, the Purusa, with the result that the Śakti is reduced to a principle of cosmic illusion and is almost discarded in the ultimate context. The Tantra goes to the other extreme and lays the highest emphasis upon the Śakti, with the result that Śiva, even though accepted as the indispensable support of the Śakti in her eternal creations, is reduced to a mere *śava* or corpse having no will of his own and so being subject to the control of his Śakti. Sri Aurobindo maintains that the deepest truth about the matter is to be obtained by viewing Śiva and Śakti, the aspects of Being and Becoming, status and dynamis, in their proper relationship. The Śakti is not an unreal, or an existent-non-existent mysterious power, but enters into the life of the Absolute as an essential factor. Yet the Absolute can by no means be conceived as subject to the Śakti. The Śakti embarks on her career of creative playfulness always in implicit obedience to the Will of the Absolute, the will which is absolutely free either to manifest or not to manifest. "In a conscious existence", says Sri Aurobindo, "which is absolute, independent of its formations, not determined by its works, we must suppose an inherent freedom to manifest or not to manifest the potentiality of movement." (The Life Divine, Vol. I, p. 127). The Reality so conceived should be carefully distinguished from "the Cosmic God of the Tantriks and Māyāvādins who is subject to Śakti or *Māyā*, Purusa involved in *Māyā* or controlled by Śakti."

#### THE NATURE OF THE WORLD

If the Absolute is, as Sri Aurobindo holds, in the nature of Saccidānanda possessed of the creative Gnosis or the self-realising Idea and also of an absolutely free Will to self-manifestation, then it follows that in his view the world must be a real and significant expression of that sovereign Will. The world is neither an accident nor an illusion, it is rooted in the nature of ultimate reality; it is neither a foolish tale nor a dreadful dream but is rather fraught with very deep significance. Those who accept the world as a self-contained self-subsistent reality are persons who cannot look beyond their nose and are blind to the higher ranges of experience. Those, on the contrary, who look down upon the world as a self-negating appearance are too dizzy to look below from the height of their intellectual attainment

or spiritual realisation. There are also people who occupy the mid-region and consider the world to be the scene of an asymptotic approximation to an ever-receding Ideal. Privileged to have a look both at the height and at the bottom, they do not yet know how to link up the two, because they have not entered into the depth that synthesises. The truth is that the world is self-objection of the Absolute or Purusottama who realises Himself in the world at every moment and yet who ever proceeds to realise Himself in novel ways and in an increasingly fuller measure. There are indeed obvious difficulties in the way of such a view, but all such difficulties as obviously melt before the rising vision of the Truth.

We shall notice here two chief considerations which have prevented the world being regarded as the free self-manifestation of the Spirit. The one is the epistemological consideration, and the other, the consideration of the world's dark features and undivine elements. The result of epistemological self-examination was in the hands of Immanuel Kant, the great German philosopher, simply disastrous for Metaphysics. Kant observes that there are certain universal and necessary factors such as space, time, substance, causality etc., which are involved in and presupposed by every piece of knowledge. Had these factors or ground-conceptions been received from without, they could not have been universal and necessary. So Kant argues that the forms of Knowledge must be the contributions of our own mind. The logical sequel to this is that the world we know is the creation of our own understanding and is phenomenal, and so incapable of being regarded as the manifestation or development of the transcendental reality which is a perfectly sealed book for our knowledge.

The master-thinkers who have come after Kant point out that Kant is led to regard reality and appearance, the noumenal and the phenomenal, as two unconnected and discontinuous hemispheres, because he starts with an unwarranted dualism of the sense and the understanding, of intuition and thought, of datum and interpretation. Even though, in our case, there is an appearance of dualism between the given factor and the interpreting act, they are, in ultimate analysis, two inseparable moments in the life of one all-inclusive Spirit. For Hegel, this Spirit is the self-distinguishing principle of self-consciousness, while for Bradley, it is an all-embracing non-relational Experience. Hegel looks upon the world as the immanent dialectical movement of the Absolute Idea. What appears to

us as the datum is already penetrated by the light of the Universal Spirit. The categories by which we interpret our experience are also the categories according to which the Universal Spirit has thought out the external world. The knowledge which we acquire by the activity of our understanding is only a reduplication of the knowledge which is embodied or objectified in outward Nature. Our own individual self is only a finite reproduction of the Absolute Self. Now, the cardinal defect of this view is that it makes the world vital to the Absolute which is the supreme principle of objective thinking, so that the Absolute is as much dependent on the world as the world on the Absolute. Moreover this view equates the temporal order entirely with the logical, there being left no room for genuine progress, development or historical unfolding. The whole process of evolution in Nature may be said to be reduced, in effect, to "the dull rattling off of a chain forged innumerable years ago."

Bradley is opposed to the view of the world as the self-objectification of an eternal Thinker. Our knowledge can by no means be reduced to a mere re-thinking of that which is already thought out,—to a mere reduplication, an otiose contemplation of that which is already accomplished. The world which we know is the product of ideal construction ; it is the result of the differentiating activity of our thought. Yet, though the world is the creation of our understanding, it does not belong like Kant's phenomena to a sort of no-man's land in between reality and thought. The world of appearance is, in the view of Bradley, not discontinuous with reality but rather an immanent development or self-articulation of the Absolute. This is because thought which is not identical with reality is not also separate from reality ; it is an organ of self-articulation of reality. From this some important conclusions follow. The world as the product of thought is unreal in as much as it is riddled with self-discrepancies, because thought which works with the mechanism of terms and relations has no native principle of togetherness and cannot reconcile the elements of plurality into a genuine self-coherent unity. Yet reality appears through the appearances and the world may rightly be characterised as a kind of manifestation of the Absolute, however incomplete or inadequate this manifestation may be. Reality is manifested in varying measures in different appearances in proportion to their varying degrees of self-coherence and inclusiveness. Moreover, appearances are the very stuff of

which reality is made, so that with a single appearance left out the Absolute would not be what it is and would suffer from lack of perfection, though in coming together in the reality the appearances must undergo varying measures of transmutation.

Bradley cannot tell us why reality appears through appearances, having regard to the fact that the latter only distort reality; nor can he tell us how the appearances are transformed in order to constitute reality. Yet Bradley is emphatic in his assertion that reality and appearance, the Absolute and the world, are mutually dependent, and in this he shows himself a true Hegelian. For him, the Absolute is the transmuted synthesis of the world, and the world is the self-contradictory manifestation of the Absolute. "Appearance without reality would be impossible, for what then could appear? And reality without appearance would be nothing, for there certainly is nothing outside appearances." (Appearance and Reality, p. 487). Such a relativity of the Absolute and the world seems to run counter to the deepest spiritual experience and militates against the intrinsic self-sufficiency of the Absolute. In Sankara's Advaitavāda we have a conception of reality as absolute freedom. Sankara's Brahman is pure consciousness which does not depend upon the world either as the object of his consciousness or as the material of his experience. In Sankara's view, the world is simply unreal from the ultimate standpoint of Brahman, so that no question of his relation to the world can arise at all. Yet the world is not a mere void or nought; it is real from the empirical standpoint, it has a sort of conventional or pragmatic reality. The world then is *anirvacaniya* or indescribable, because it is neither real as it disappears from the standpoint of Brahman, nor unreal as it is true from the empirical standpoint, nor both real and unreal, as that would be a manifest self-contradiction.

Sankara is true to his spiritual realisation in showing forth Brahman as absolute freedom and as pure existence-consciousness-bliss. But in his view of the world he betrays his failure to reconcile the reality of the world with the freedom and self-sufficiency of the Absolute in the profoundest and all-affirming spiritual experience. Sankara's position is also quite unsatisfactory to the reason. He says that the world is real from the empirical standpoint and unreal from the ultimate standpoint. So far so quite good. But then the question would irresistably arise: What is the connection between these two standpoints? Either there is some connection and the empirical

standpoint derives from the ultimate or there is no connection. In the former case, the world cannot be said to be wholly non-existent from the standpoint of Brahman and the necessity is imposed on us of showing how or why the world arises from Brahman and in what manner the empirical standpoint is derived from the ultimate standpoint. In the latter case, the ultimate and the empirical standpoints, Brahman and the world should both be accepted as equally real and as discontinuous spheres of experience. The same difficulty may be put in another way. What precise meaning is to be given to the statement that 'the world is false from the standpoint of Brahman'? Is the world false in the sense that it is non-existent in the absolute sense of the term and as such has no mode of being for the Brahman-consciousness? Or, is it false in the sense of having a mysterious real-unreal sort of existence? In the latter sense, there arises the necessity of showing the connection between Brahman and the world and the manner how or the reason why the world is derived from Brahman. In the former sense, absolute non-existence must be the very essence of the world, so that all talk of its reality from the empirical standpoint is only a sort of euphemism. This conclusion can be avoided only if the empirical standpoint is shown to be connected with the ultimate standpoint and to derive some reality and significance therefrom.

Sri Aurobindo would say that the empirical standpoint answers to a definite purpose or will of the Absolute, the will to self-manifestation in conditions provided by the Inconscience. We have already seen that according to Sri Aurobindo *Avidyā* or Ignorance which envelops our world of experience is not the negation of Brahman but a purposeful and practical self-oblivion of consciousness-force for a specific mode of divine self-manifestation. Sankara is perfectly right when he says that Brahman is absolute freedom and eternally self-sufficient, but he errs in limiting Brahman to one particular poise of its being. The Absolute is capable of existing simultaneously as the utterly formless and also as the creative principle of infinite forms, —as the static Silence and also as the dynamic Logos. Sri Aurobindo admits that the world as it exists is full of imperfections; it is the scene of such dualities as birth and death, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, virtue and vice, truth and error, ignorance and knowledge, etc. But Sri Aurobindo is emphatic in his view that Saccidānanda is present even in the midst of these dualities. For, birth and death are only

limited expressions of the immortality of the Absolute ; pleasure and pain are distorted reflections of his infinite joy ; virtue and vice are inadequate manifestations of his perfection ; truth and error or knowledge and ignorance are the imperfect shadows cast on the screen of *avidyā* by the self-shining consciousness of the Absolute. The secret purpose which controls the world-process is eventual transformation of these dualities into their ultimate essence and the establishment of the kingdom of Truth and Immortality in the world of matter, life and mind. Sri Aurobindo believes that body, life and mind can all be purged of their present limitations and impurities and converted into perfect channels of expression of Saccidānanda. This is possible because the material body is essentially the lower form of manifestation of the pure substantiality of Saccidānanda, the life, of his infinite power or consciousness-force, and the mind, of his vast truth-consciousness. The world then is derived from Brahman, is the abode of Brahman and is constantly striving to be the manifestation of the glories of Brahman.

#### THE NATURE OF THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

The problem of individuality constitutes perhaps the greatest stumbling block in the way of mental or spiritual Absolutism. If the whole of existence be embraced in one all-inclusive Absolute Spirit possessed of sovereign reality and over-ruling power, what room is there for the individual self having independent existence and freedom of will? Should not individuality be rather treated as a vanishing quantity, and a "formal distinctness" which is entirely relative to the "impotence" of our thought? If ultimate reality be an Absolute in the true sense of the term, you should reduce the individual, either, like Spinoza, to a mode of consciousness of the one infinite substance which the Absolute is, or, like Bradley, to a mere appearance which is bound to be "lost" and "dissipated" in the life of the Absolute. This modal or adjectival theory of the individual seems to be a necessary consequence of the absoluteness of reality. Sankara goes a step even further. He says that individuality is neither a mode of the Absolute nor an appearance which qualifies the Absolute after having undergone the necessary amount of transformation, but is a mere illusion created by *Avidyā*. It completely disappears when Brahman is realised. The self in the individual is non-different from Brahman and is as such eternally free and never gets bound.

'The appearance of assuming individuality and undergoing the miseries of bondage is entirely relative to Ignorance.

If, however, you refuse to shut your eye to the reality and significance of individuation, you may be driven, if not sufficiently cautious, to the opposite extreme of atomism, separatism or pluralism. You may, like Leibnitz, look upon the individual as a spiritual atom or monad living out with perfect independence an insular existence of its own, so that God is only a *primus inter pares*, an "each among eaches", the Monad of all monads. You may again, like McTaggart, exalt the individual selves to the rank of eternally perfect and self-subsistent spirits and reduce ultimate reality to an impersonal unity of these spirits having no centralised consciousness of its own. But such pluralism runs counter to the demands of speculative thought and the revelations of spiritual experience alike. The atomic theory of the individual is as one-sided and imperfect as the adjectival theory; both these are reactionary extremes which are repugnant to thought and intuition.

Some honest attempts have, however, been made to reconcile the absoluteness of the Supreme and the reality of the individual. There is very wide authoritative backing for what is known as *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda* which looks upon the individual as an attribute or differentiation of the Absolute. Rāmānuja says that the individual self is assuredly real and not a mere appearance, but then it is ontologically inseparable from the Absolute and is wholly dependent upon the latter just as an attribute depends upon the substance, or a part depends upon the whole or a body depends upon the soul. Hegel holds that the individual selves enjoy a relative measure of independence and reality as factors in the life of the Absolute Self and as such should not be regarded as unsubstantial modes of an infinite substance. This gives us what has been called Panentheism as distinguished from Pantheism. Royce says that individual selves are the self-imagings or self-representations of the Absolute which is a self-representative system. The uniqueness of every individual is derived from the fact that it is the fulfilment of a certain purpose which belongs to the Will of God. Pringle Pattison maintains that the individual is a standing differentiation of the Absolute and a focalised expression of the universe. It does indeed pass our comprehension how the individual which is inseparable from, and entirely dependent upon, the Absolute, can yet enjoy substantive reality and a relative measure of freedom. But Pringle Pattison points out that we should still

accept the fact of individuation as the standing miracle of the universe, a comprehension of which would require the transcending of our very conditions of individuality. Individuation is not only real but is also highly significant. The typical business of the universe lies in shaping, moulding, and developing perfect individuals, so that the world may be characterised as a "vale of soul-making" in the deepest sense of the expression. (Pringle Pattison's *Idea of God*, p. 260).

Sri Aurobindo agrees that individuality is not a mere appearance or a vanishing quantity, or an illusory product of Ignorance,—it rather belongs to the fundamental structure of ultimate reality. The true individuality of the self persists even after one secures spiritual liberation from entanglement in the lower nature or *aparā prakṛti*. What disappears or is dissipated after such liberation is the false individuality of the ego which is a product of Ignorance or a formation of lower Nature. While the ego is entrenched in a sense of separation from the rest of the universe, the true individual participates in the life of the cosmic Self and is also aware of itself as inseparable from the supra-cosmic transcendent Divine. Sri Aurobindo is thus in agreement with *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda* in holding that true individuality is an eternal portion of God or a standing differentiation of ultimate reality. But still in his view with regard to the essence of the individual self, he is more at one with *Advaitavāda* than with *Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda*. The individual self is in being and essence identical with God and God is indivisibly present in every individual. It is therefore eternally perfect and free from all limitations; it is not subject to birth, growth and decay but is rather placed above the flux of becoming. The Individual Self is God himself in a certain poise of His being, and may be said to differ from God as one among His many poises or modes of being. Being identical with God in being and essence, it differs only in respect of form and function. Every individual self is a centre of action of the Divine, and functions as the medium of His self-manifestation.

The highest goal of the individual Self lies not simply in attaining liberation or perfection, because it is eternally free and perfect and one with the Divine. It is a mistake to suppose that the Individual grows and develops with the process of evolution, because the true Individual is above the process of evolution. Royce and Pringle Pattison consider true individuality to be the product of evolution, because in their view the essence of individuality lies in a unique organisation of growing ex-



periences. But, in truth, the Individual Self only supports and presides from above the process of evolution over a certain unique organisation of experience. That which is present in the heart of every empirical evolving individual and itself also grows with the growth of that individual is what Sri Aurobindo calls the psychic being, the "*Chaitya Puruṣa*" of the Upanishads. This psychic being is a spark of the Divine involved in the empirical individual and it controls the evolution of the physico-vital-mental being as the highest representative of the supra-temporal Individual Self within the temporal flux. The psychic being may also be described as a certain emanation which proceeds from the Individual Self and gets involved in the process of evolution in order to guide it steadily towards the fulfilment of divine purpose. On the attainment of fullness of experience and spiritual realisation, the psychic being is reunited with the Individual Self.

From what has been said above it is evident that there is some truth in the view that the typical business of the universe is "soul-making" or the moulding and developing of perfect individuals. But in what sense is this true? Are we to understand by perfect individuals simply morally perfect souls with extremely limited powers of body, life and mind? Sri Aurobindo says that perfect Individuals such as are intended to be the crowning consummation of the process of terrestrial evolution will be spiritually perfect beings or supermen who will be above the dualities of vice and virtue, bad and good, error and truth, etc., and who will participate in the infinite power, infinite knowledge, infinite bliss and immortality of God. They will not be disembodied spirits or spirits imprisoned in an imperfect physical-vital-mental vehicle, but will completely divinise their lower nature and transform their body, life and mind into perfect instruments for manifesting the glories of Saccidānanda on Earth. The possibility of such a consummation is rooted in the fact that the true Self of the individual is eternally free and perfect and essentially identical with the Divine. The body, the life and the mind which belong to the empirical individual over the evolution of which the Individual Self presides, are capable of being thoroughly divinised through spiritual sādhanā and of thus revealing the perfection of the Spirit, because they are, in ultimate analysis, lower forms of manifestation of the constitutive elements of Saccidānanda. The typical business of the universe appears then to be invested with a very deep significance indeed. The centre of interest is

shifted from the individual to the Divine, from the unique organisation or focalisation of experience to the objective self-manifestation of the Supreme Spirit. Individuality is essentially a function or form of being of the supra-individual Spirit. Individualisation or unique organisation of experience in a finite centre on which Pringle Pattison, Royce and others lay so much emphasis, does not constitute the essence of the Individual Self, nor has it any value on its own account ; it derives its value from the fact that it is instrumental to the objective manifestation of the Supreme Divine through the Individual Self. Individuality essentially exists in God, by God and for God, so that the deepest truth about evolution is the self-manifestation of the Supreme Divine with the Individual Selves as the centres of action and with the world as the field of divine manifestation. The universe is "a vale of soul-making", and aims at the development of perfect embodied individuals, only because the latter will be the best medium of self-manifestation of God in the world, or of the Spirit in matter.

# Sri Aurobindo and the Isha Upanishad

By C. C. DUTT

It is necessary to state at the outset that our intention in this essay is not to institute a comparison between the teachings of the Master and the philosophy of the Upanishads. Such a comparison would be futile and entirely out of our scope, believing as we do that our Master is that which he has himself described as the inner Guide, the World Teacher, the Jagat Guru, secret in the hearts of all. He has been that always, from the earliest dawn of man's life on this planet, effectually presiding over every stage of the evolution of human thought and human culture. To each age has he spoken in the language of that age, and unfolded to such as listened the Supreme Truth underlying the phenomenal life of the world. That Truth is ever the same, though translated into the language of the hearer from age to age it has appeared different. Now today, the Moment has arrived; and the Master has proclaimed before a sad and mad and bewildered world his Integral Yoga, the completest harmony of all the Yogas that have gone before. For, the time has definitely come for man to take the next step in evolution, the bold leap into the luminous world of the Supermind, where he is destined to realise the Truth of truths,—that this world, diverse and manifold though it appears, is one and indivisible in the Brahman—that He is everywhere, always, enthroned in the hearts of all beings and all things. Integral Yoga, like every other Yoga, has its philosophy, and that philosophy has been elucidated by the Master in his *Life Divine* and his *Synthesis of Yoga*. One who is initiated into this Yoga cannot accept exclusively any narrow school of philosophy, nor can he follow exclusively any one of the various paths of Yoga. He has no deity, no cult, no method that he can call his own to the exclusion of other deities, other cults, other methods. He cannot say, this is my chosen deity, these are my Scriptures, this is my Guru,—not those that others revere. In him, the paths of knowledge, love and works have become one and indistinguishable. Such is the simple philosophy of our beloved Master.

In the long history of the evolution of spiritual culture in

India, the philosophy of the Upanishads occupies a unique place. It is not, however, a philosophy in the ordinary sense of the word, for all the later schools have accepted the Upanishads along with the Veda as revealed Scripture, and as such have commented on them, each in its own way. Sri Aurobindo has not written at length on the Upanishadic literature generally, as he has done in the case of the Veda. He has however translated and commented on two short but remarkable of the Upanishads, the Isha and the Kena. We shall reserve the latter for presentation on a future occasion and shall here restrict ourselves principally to what the Master has said in his brilliant commentary on the Isha Upanishad. Before doing so, however, let us see where exactly in reference to the Veda should we place the Upanishads—at least the twelve principal ones, for there are Upanishads and Upanishads, and some undoubtedly belong to a much later period.

Vedanta in a narrow sense is one of the six well-known schools of Hindu philosophy, the Uttara-Mimamsa. But the word has also a much wider sense, and in this sense the principal Upanishads form part of it. Sri Aurobindo finds the Isha to be one of the more ancient Vedantic writings in style, substance and versification, the most antique of the extant metrical Upanishads. He places it in the earlier of the two great periods of Upanishadic thought. The writings of that period still kept close to the Vedic roots and preserved the spiritual pragmatism of the Vedic Rishis. In the next period the Upanishads entered ascetic and anti-pragmatic phase. Human life and activity began to be stigmatised as false and illusory, definitely hurtful to man's spiritual interest.

Already in the earlier period the two view-points had come to a clash and the Isha had to face the problem of harmonising Karma in the world with the asceticism of the Monist. The method it has followed right through is "the uncompromising reconciliation of uncompromising extremes". It has given no quarter to extreme illusionism, and that in a language which the later Monists found difficult to explain away. Further on, we shall see how the great Shankara attempted to do this specially in his commentary on the second verse, and what Sri Aurobindo has to say about it.

Let us go back to the spirit of the Veda, for it is necessary to know what the Veda was before we can really grasp the Vedantic standpoint. The general Western view that the hymns of the Rig Veda were songs composed by the virile and sturdy

peasants of primitive India in praise of the powers of Nature need not be seriously considered. At any rate, this is hardly the place to discuss the point. Our purpose will be served by giving two short extracts from Sri Aurobindo's "Secret of the Veda"—

"Veda is the creation of the age anterior to our intellectual philosophies."

"Thought proceeded by other methods than those of our logical reasoning. . . . The wisest then depended on inner experience and the suggestions of the intuitive mind for all knowledge that ranged beyond mankind's ordinary perceptions and daily activities. Their aim was illumination, not logical conviction, their ideal the inspired seer, not the accurate reasoner."

Drishti and Sruti, sight and hearing, themselves Vedic expressions, signify revelatory knowledge and the contents of inspiration. There is nowhere in the Veda any suggestion of the miraculous or the supernatural. Vedic Sādhana is an onward and upward march of the human soul on the path of Truth. As it goes forward, "new vistas of power and light open to its aspiration." The Rishis of the hymns were entirely indifferent to any striving for poetical originality or to any attempt at novelty of thought. There is a striking sameness visible in the hymns, same notion, same terms and figures, often the same phrases. Yet, their finished metrical forms, skill in technique and great variations of style preclude the possibility of their being the work of a rude primitive people. Sri Aurobindo calls the hymns "the living breath of a supreme and conscious Art". And yet, to the seers their art was only a means, not an end. Their end was pragmatic and utilitarian in the highest sense of the words. The aim of the Rishi was spiritual progress—his own and that of others. Of the Vedic hymn generally Sri Aurobindo says "it rose out of the soul, it became the power of the mind, it was the vehicle of the self-expression in some important . . . moment of the life's inner history. It helped him to express the god in him, to destroy the devourer, the expresser of evil."

From internal evidence Sri Aurobindo has come to the conclusion that the Veda as we have it marks the close of a period. It may even be that some of the hymns had an earlier lyric form. Or it may be that the Veda, as it stands, is only a selection compiled out of a much vaster body of hymns,—“a more richly vocal Aryan past”. The traditional compiler, Vyasa,

Krishna of the Isle, had his face towards the obscurity of the coming Kali Yuga, the iron age, which was soon to overtake the glorious Age of Intuition that had gone before. He compiled the Veda for a race already turning towards darkness and decadence, already looking for "the easy and secure gains of the physical life and of the intellect and the logical reasoning".

Decadence had well set in before the Vedantic seer stepped in with the object of recovering what he could of the ancient light. But wherefore this obscuration of the Vedic lore? Sri Aurobindo says, it was inevitable. Firstly, there is a law of the human cycle, a law which governs the evolution of man's thought and culture. Secondly, because the whole system was such as could not endure long. The experiences on which the Vedic seer depended were difficult to the ordinary mortal, the faculties which aided the Rishi in his search after Truth were crude and imperfect in other men. Once the first intensity had passed, "periods of fatigue and relaxation were bound to intervene". The hymns as they stood, deliberately ambiguous in their language, were no longer understood. Even the priests, the custodians of the Veda, who conducted the rituals, did not comprehend the meaning of the texts. In the old days texts and rituals had gone together. The same person was priest, teacher and seer. But when obscuration set in, even expert priests who performed these sacrifices did not quite realise the power or import of the sacred words they recited. The power disappeared, the light departed, what was left was but a mass of myth and ritual.

This state of things could not last long, and a powerful revival set in, which is represented in our sacred literature by the Brāhmanas and the Upanishads. The former had for their end mainly the conservation of the forms, while the latter aimed at revealing the soul of the Veda. With the Brāhmanas we are not concerned in this essay. Their authors proceeded in their own way to fix and preserve the details of Vedic rites and rituals. The Upanishads followed another method. Their composers "sought to recover the lost or waning knowledge by meditation and spiritual experience". The text of the Mantra became to them a starting point, a prop or a seed of thought. The sacrifice, to them, became more and more a useless and meaningless survival. They concentrated themselves on the search after the Supreme Truth by meditation. No doubt they recovered the old truths, but they put them invariably in new forms. Even the mode of expression changed. The old symbolic

language, so characteristic of the Vedic mystic, was dropped in favour of a more philosophical style. The old "veil of concrete myth and poetic figure" was cast away. As Sri Aurobindo observes, their real work was to found Vedanta more than to interpret Veda. In time the Vedic text became as obsolete as Vedic ritual to the new thinker of the Upanishadic period. The Master sums up his account of the period of transition by saying — "the Ages of Intuition were passing away into the first dawn of the Age of Reason."

"Upanishads, increasingly clear and direct in their language, became the fountain-head of the highest Indian thought."

But all this took time to accomplish itself. Buddhism had to come and declare an open revolt against the Vedic sacrifices. Rational philosophy had to crystallise itself into various schools of thought, which acknowledged the old scriptures in theory but brought in startling innovations by interpreting them freely on the basis of reason. Asceticism and renunciation got final hold of the Hindu imagination. Last came the Puranic revival. Language was still further simplified, new forms of religion arose to suit the new environments. As intuition had given place to rationalism, so in time rationalism gave place to conventionalism.

To go back specifically to the Isha Upanishad, the subject of our essay, we have seen that it belongs to the earlier period of the Upanishadic Age, and is therefore to a large extent in touch with the outlook of the Vedic sage. In other words, though a Book of Knowledge, it is familiar with the time-honoured Book of Works. The last verse is taken directly from the Rig Veda and is an invocation to the Vedic God, Agni, expressing the seekers' aspiration towards the supreme felicity. Not only Agni, but Sūrya and Mātariśwan of the Veda find prominent mention in this little book of eighteen verses. The Rishi takes for his key-note the fundamental unity of all beings and things, and deals with the whole problem of man's life and work in relation to the Universe and to the Lord of the Universe.

Certain things have, however, to be remembered about a book of this type. It was composed not to be read but heard, and heard only by people who had a general familiarity with the tenor of thought of the Rishis, and had even some personal spiritual experience. The ideas behind each verse are implicit rather than explicit. What reasoning there is, is suggested more than conveyed expressly by words. The Upanishad being a vehicle of illumination and not of instruction, the hearer proceeded from light to light, "confirming his intuitions and

verifying by his experience". There is very little room in it for logic as we know it, and what logic there is, is that which Sri Aurobindo calls elsewhere the logic of the Infinite.

The commentary of the Master is couched in a language and style comprehensible to the modern mind. His object is avowedly "to present the ideas of the Upanishad in their completeness, underline the suggestions, supply the necessary transitions and bring out the suppressed but always implicit reasoning".

In the short space at our disposal the best way for us is to proceed verse by verse and indicate the manner in which Sri Aurobindo has brought out the hidden meaning of each independently of all commentaries that have gone before. The first verse is—

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।

तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् ॥ १

All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universe of motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy ; lust not after any man's possession. (1)

Right at the start, God and the World are brought face to face and their relations fixed. The whole universe and each object in it are mutable and transient. The Lord of the movement alone is immutable, stable and eternal. Each separate object is in truth the whole Universe, though in the movement they are contained and continent —Jagatyām Jagat, movement in movement, world in world. The Lord, one and indivisible, abides in the sum and in the part. He is, in the language of the Gita, अविभक्तं विभक्तमिव,—ever undivided, yet ever appearing to be divided. The whole of Him is as completely present in the minutest speck of dust as in the vast Himalayan range. Who and what then is the individual? Sri Aurobindo says, he "partakes of the nature of the universal, refers back to it for its source of activity, is subject to its laws and part of cosmic Nature".

Yet man, essentially divine, perfect and free, seems to be imperfect, limited, and enslaved to Nature. He wants to possess and enjoy the world, but cannot because of his Ignorance and Egoism. He is blind and does not see that each object, separate



though it appears, is only a frontal appearance of the Universe, only a wave of the one undivided ocean,—yet a wave that is the whole ocean. He does not see that he is one with all beings and all things, and is unable to enter into harmony with the universal. He desires to possess and enjoy, but as a separate being. This desire enslaves him and is the cause of all disharmony and dissatisfaction, pain and suffering. If he could but realise the one Divine in him he would not lust or desire, but inalienably contain, possess and enjoy. Hence it is that in the second line the injunction of the Sage is. "By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy." Renunciation is the absolute condition of free enjoyment. But what is this renunciation? The Master warns us that it is not "a moral constraint of self-denial or a physical rejection". It implies that the individual should realise absolute unity and not look upon any thing as an object of physical possession. Nothing should be looked upon as in the possession of another. There is no room for greed in this attitude. Realising the One Self in him, the individual possesses the world in the cosmic consciousness. He has no need for physical possession. In an infinite free delight in all things, desire vanishes. Desire and greed cannot stay where Ānanda, the Bliss of the One, has entered.

Man becomes free in his soul and yet lives in the world. Does this freedom imply abstaining from works? On the contrary the second verse enjoins,—

कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेत् शतं समाः ।

एवं त्वयि नान्यथेतोऽस्ति न कर्म लिप्यते नरे ॥ २ ॥

Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years. Thus it is in thee and not otherwise than this ; action cleaves not to a man. (2)

The word "*Eva*", "verily", in the first line is to be noted as laying stress on a life of action. The meaning is clearly "doing works indeed and not refraining from them." Shankara reads "works" in the first line to mean Vedic sacrifices, but "action" in the second line to mean "evil action". The whole verse is explained away as a concession to the ignorant, and it is stressed that the wise abstain from action and renounce the world. This rendering is obviously forced and unnatural, Sri Aurobindo says.

To understand the true meaning we have to realise Brahman in his two aspects, the inactive Soul and the active Soul. The first verse has enjoined a realisation of oneness with the Lord within. Here the Sage goes farther and says that in order to be free in your soul and yet live in the world you have to be one with the Active Brahman. The Lord expresses Himself in the movement, and not merely to the Inactive Soul who is the silent witness and enjoyer. In the Gita the Lord says, **वर्त एव च कर्मणि**, that is, He fulfils himself in the world by works, and conveys to Arjuna that he also is in the body for self-fulfilment by action. In fact, man in the body cannot abstain from action, for he has to keep up his body. Moreover, even his inertia produces reactions in the universal movement. The idea that refraining from action brings about liberation of the soul is illusory.

Action is shunned because it is feared that man becomes thereby a slave to desire, and to the energy behind the action. But if you see the Brahman within every object you cannot get entangled in desire. For then, you seek a delight in the Lord within and not in the thing which is but the outer husk. Likewise, by getting behind the apparent world to the Soul hidden behind it you act with the freedom of that Soul. Brahman is the Lord of the energy behind every action, and by realising unity with him, the energy cannot entangle you, your personal responsibility is at an end. Therefore, says the Sage, identify yourself with the Lord of the movement and not with the movement, and you are free from bondage. Action cleaves not to you.

If you do not realise this, and in your ignorance interfere with the play of the One in the Many by abstaining from action, you go counter to the law of His manifestation. You become the slayer of the soul, and when you pass away from this world you enter into a state of blind darkness. This is what the Rishi says in the third verse—

**असूर्या नाम ते लोका अन्धेन तमसावृताः ।**

**तांस्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्ति ये के चात्महनो जनाः ॥ ३ ॥**

Sunless are those worlds and enveloped in blind gloom whereto all they in their passing hence resort who are slayers of their souls. (3)

By death one does not go out of the movement but passes

into a state of consciousness other than that of this earth. This state may be dark or bright. The slayer of the soul enters the dark Sunless plane, while he that identifies himself with the Active Soul behind all things and all actions enters into the worlds of light and bliss. The idea of Sunless obscure planes and Sun-lit luminous planes is carried on, as we shall find, in some of the later verses. The Sun here is the Vedic god *Surya* who represents in the Veda the Divine illumination, the self-luminous Truth underlying all things.

The next two verses (4-5) develop the idea of the first verse. The essential unity of the unmoving Lord and the moving Creation is amplified. Both are the one Brahman.

अनेजदेकं मनसो जवीयो नैनहेवा आप्नुवन् पूर्वमर्षत् ।  
तद्वावतोऽन्यानत्येति तिष्ठत् तस्मिन्नपो मातरिश्वा दधाति ॥ ४ ॥  
तदेजति तन्नैजति तद्दूरे तद्वन्तिके ।  
तदन्तरस्य सर्वस्य तदु सर्वस्यास्य बाह्यतः ॥ ५ ॥

One unmoving that is swifter than Mind, That the Gods reach not, for It progresses ever in front. That, standing, passes beyond others as they run. In That the Master of Life establishes the Waters. (4)

That moves and That moves not ; That is far and the same is near ; That is within all this and That is outside all this. (5)

The first point that strikes one here is that the Isha Upanishad is opposed to Illusionism or exclusive Monism. The One is real, but so are the Many—the One pervades the Many. In the fourth verse here Brahman is the One unmoving. In the fifth It is that which moves and that which moves not. The meaning is clear ; the Lord and the world are essentially one Brahman though they appear to be distinct. The Lord is the one Reality, stable and eternal ; stable because He is beyond Time and Space, eternal because He is ever in possession of all that was, is and will be. He transcends all causality and relativity, and is immutable. The stable one is swifter than mind and the gods cannot reach it. The world is a movement of the Divine Consciousness in Space and Time. Something much more puissant, swift and free than the mental consciousness

creates it. 'The gods are but cosmic powers that uphold the laws governing the creation. These laws as well as these gods endure only as long as the world endures. They control the progressive movement in Space and Time, in fact they keep it up. Therefore it is that the Sage describes them as running in their course. But they cannot touch the Lord who is completely unaffected by his own movement, who is both Absolute and Infinite. The gods run towards an imagined goal, but when they reach it they find that they have to go forward to a further realisation. And so on and on. They can never get to the Unknowable.

The "others" in the fourth verse are all becomings in the world, *Sarva-bhutani*. They are in reality the One Brahman representing Itself in the separate Many. Their running in the course of Nature is merely a working out in time and space of something that Brahman already possesses. Hence it is said,—standing, It passes beyond others as they run. As Sri Aurobindo observes, "Everything is already realised by It as the Lord before it can be accomplished by the separate personalities in the movement."

In That the Master of Life establishes the Waters. *Mātariśwan* is the Vedic god *Vāyu*, the Divine principle of Life which extends itself in Matter. *Apas* was explained formerly as works, but Sri Aurobindo does not accept that explanation. As accented in the text, it can only mean waters. In the Veda *Apas* has a very definite meaning; it signifies the sevenfold state of consciousness—Divine Being, Divine Conscious-Power or Will, Divine Bliss, Divine Truth, Mind, Life and Matter. This septuple principle is also called the seven streams flowing into or out of the *Hṛdya Samudra*, the general Sea of Consciousness in man.

Brahman the Self-existent, the conscious and the blissful descends in his involution down into Matter, by way of Truth-Consciousness, Mind and Life. Into Brahman involved in Matter universal Life-Power pours itself as dynamic energy, and the ascent commences. This is the nature of the created world. The Seven Cosmic principles are co-existent in it eternally. The involution of the One in the Many and the evolution of the Many in the One make up the law of the cosmic Cycle. We thus see Brahman in all beings and things in the created universe as well as beyond it. It is individual, universal and transcendental. It is the Continent and the Indwelling Spirit of everything that we know of, small and great. It is near and yet far. To realise it is to become perfect and immortal.

The next two verses relate to self-realisation—the Self in all, all in the Self, the Self that becomes all.

यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मन्येवानुपश्यति ।  
 सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ॥ ६ ॥  
 यस्मिन् सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मैवाभूद्विजानतः ।  
 तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥ ७ ॥

But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences  
 and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter  
 from aught. (6)

He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all  
 existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect  
 Knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall  
 he have grief who sees everywhere oneness? (7)

All things in this world, animate and inanimate, are unstable and transient. But fundamentally and essentially they are the Self, Ātman, Stable and Eternal. Phenomenally they appear many but really they are the one Self. Ātman dwells in each of them and they are all in the Ātman. When man realises the truth of this unity he shakes off the bonds of ignorance and egoism, he transcends the dualities.

All *Jugupsā*, all shrinking, disappears as the Vision of all in the Self and the Self in all intensifies. Shrinking, like dislike, fear and hatred arises from division, from personal opposition to other beings. When these perversions of feeling cease to exist, perfect equality of the soul is realised. This is the import of the sixth verse. It should be noted, however, that all personal recoil must be got over, attraction as well as repulsion. If hatred and shrinking have to go, attachment and desire have to go as well; for, these are all reactions of our limited self-formation. When we awaken to our true nature, and the Self in us goes out to embrace all creatures, there is complete harmony established, the human view gives place to the Divine view. But for this culmination it is not enough to have an intellectual vision only. One must become what one sees. And the whole inner life must be changed, all parts must consent to this realisation. To the awakened Ātman self-delusion cannot come. To one dwelling in the Ananda of the Lord sorrow is an impossibility. This is

the meaning of the seventh verse. The synthetic ideal of this Upanishad, to embrace at one and the same time Vidya and Avidya, Birth and Non-Birth is implicit here in these two verses. The supreme realisation of the Rishi expressed in the ecstatic exclamation "I am He" in the sixteenth verse is likewise foreshadowed here.

Under these verses, Sri Aurobindo has elucidated in brief the principal ideas of the Upanishads generally. But in the short space at our command we can barely refer to the main points of this elucidation. It is necessary, however, that we should do at least that much to enable the reader to understand the full import of the next verse and those that follow.

स पर्यगाच्छुक्रमकायमव्रणमस्त्राविरं शुद्धमपावद्धम ।

कविर्मनीषी परिभूः स्वयम्भूर्याथातथ्यतोऽर्थान् व्यदधात्

शाश्वतीभ्यः समाभ्यः ॥ ८॥

It is He that has gone abroad—That which is bright, bodiless, without scar of imperfection, without sinews pure and unpierced by evil. The Seer, the Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere, the Self-existent has ordered objects perfectly according to their nature from years sempiternal. (8)

Brahman is one, one without a second—indeed, all is Brahman—It is identical not single, not numerically one.

Oneness is the eternal truth, diversity is but a play of this oneness. In creating, the Lord does not make something out of nothing, or one thing out of another. Creating is not a making at all but a becoming—a going abroad, a self-projection of Brahman.

Numerically, the One and the Many are equally true of Brahman. The Many are representations in Chit, various and innumerable, of the Absolute. What the Absolute regards it becomes. Each individual is but Brahman himself in various forms taking part in the infinite play of the Divine Consciousness. To realise this is the aim of every seeker after the Truth. Realisation is immortality.

The individual may identify himself entirely with the One, or he may regard himself eternally different from the One or he may look upon himself as one with it and yet different for ever. The reader will recognise in these three attitudes the

basis of the three systems, Monism, Dualism and qualified Monism. They appear contradictory, but are really co-existent, and can be realised by an individual rising to Brahman consciousness.

Our own mental consciousness cannot grasp the Absolute. The mind tries to realise It by the negative process of *Neti, Neti*. But the Brahman is not a void. It is very real and positive—real both as the One and as the Many. Still, “of all relations oneness is the secret base, not multiplicity. Oneness constitutes and upholds the multiplicity, multiplicity does not constitute and uphold the oneness.”

Brahman representing Itself in the Cosmos as the Stable is *Purusha*, representing Itself as the Motional is *Prakriti*. Cosmic life is the play of this *Purusha* and this *Prakriti*, *Prakriti* is the power of the *Purusha*. She is *Shakti*, the Divine *Māya*, as conceived in the Upanishads. The lower or *Aparā Prakriti*—*Māyā* in the sense of magic or illusion—is a later conception.

We have seen that our true self is Brahman—free, luminous, blissful, beyond time and space. The *Ātman* represents itself in the creative consciousness in three states depending on the relations between God and Nature,—*Akshara* or the unmoving immutable, *Kshara* or the moving mutable and the Supreme or the *Purushottama*. The first reflects the changes and movements of Nature, the third stands back from these changes and movements, calm and pure, a witness. The *Kshara* enjoys the changes and divisions and duality and seems to be controlled by them. But in truth He is not so controlled. *Akshara* is His hidden freedom. The Supreme *Purushottama* contains and enjoys both Stability and Motion, both Unity and Diversity, but is not limited by either of them. It is this Supreme Self, *Paramātmān*, that the seeker has to realise in both *Isha* and *Jagat*.

In the sevenfold movement of Nature, the Self represents itself in seven different ways. In the physical consciousness, the material being. In the vital consciousness, the vital being. In the mental consciousness, the mental being. In the supramental consciousness, the supramental being.

In the consciousness proper to the Divine Beatitude, the all-blissful being. In the self-aware consciousness, the all-conscious Soul, the all-powerful Will, the source and lord of the universe. In the consciousness of the *Sat* or the pure Existent, the pure divine Self. Man can live in any of these states, can be anything he wills from inert Matter to the pure Existent.

In the Vedānta the three lower planes are the *Aparārdha*, the three highest are the *Parārdha*, and in between them there is the plane dominated by the Divine Truth. The Nature of the upper half is the *Parā Prakriti*, that of the lower is *Aparā Prakriti*. Immortality characterises the higher, while death characterises the lower half.

When Man in the lower half realises Sachchidānanda his mind is converted into supermind, Truth or *Vijnāna*, his life into self-aware conscious Power, his body into the pure essence of *Sat*. If this cannot be done perfectly here on earth, the soul realises the truth in some other world, Sunlit and luminous, but has to return to the earthly body to complete the evolution. The Kena says in a famous verse इह चेदवेदीत् अथ सत्यमस्ति. Sri Aurobindo is explicit on the point,—“a progressively perfect realisation in the body is the aim of human evolution.”

Ātman may remain self-contained apart from Its creation or It may embrace or possess it as its Lord. From the eighth verse it would appear that It does both these things at one and the same time. Ātman is supramental but is reflected in the human mind. If the mind is pure, the reflection is clear and bright. But if it is impure and troubled, the reflection is obscure and distorted. On a disturbed surface pure Knowledge is reflected as the dualities of truth and error—pure Will as sin and virtue—pure Beatitude as pleasure and pain. Egoism and Ignorance create all this distortion, the *Kshara Purusha* identifying himself with division, limitation and change. But with the vision of the One, distortion disappears, Knowledge, Will and Beatitude are reflected perfectly and Divine Truth lights up the semi-obscure mind.

We have already under verses 6 and 7 traced the stages by which the seeker realises the perfect Beatitude, active and dynamic but delivered from the dualities of mortal existence.

Now coming to the eighth verse we find that it opens with the phrase, He went abroad. Obviously then, the Upanishads do not teach us that the true Self is an impersonal and inactive Brahman only. In these scriptures Brahman is referred to as both It and He—as both Impersonal and Personal. In a general comprehensive way the Rishis often call the Brahman, That. But even then they mean and include the Lord of the world who creates, governs and destroys. Numerous instances can be found of this. The Upanishads, however, prefer to describe the Lord of creation as *Isha*, *Deva* and *Purusha*. The Lord who inhabits all mutable forms and who at the same time



holds them in his immutable Self is He that went abroad. He is the all-pervading *Purusha* whom the Sage sees in the sixteenth verse, and cries out "the *Purusha* there and there, He am I". He is the Being that has become all Becomings. But what is the manner and nature of this becoming? The Rishi proceeds to unfold it.

The Isha of the Vedanta is not a Personal God in the ordinary sense—a glorified human being. He is Sachchidānanda—the Pure Existent, Self-aware and All-Blissful—in His Self-delight becoming the universe. His Consciousness turns into Knowledge and Force, His Delight into Love. His awareness and His delight, when intensive, is proper to the Silent Brahman; when diffusive, to the active Lord. Thus it is clear that it is Brahman that becomes, and what He becomes is also the Brahman. *तत्* and *सः* are ever the same.

He that went abroad means He that extended himself in the Universe. In this extension we have therefore two aspects, one of immutability, and another of mutability in time and space. The two aspects are different and yet mutually complementary.

The Upanishad uses a string of neuter adjectives to express the Immutable Absolute,—“Bright, bodiless, without scar, without sinews, pure, unpierced by evil.” To express the same Absolute in relation to the created world it uses four masculine names,—“The Seer, the Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere the Self-becoming.” The pure unmoving is the basis of the play of movement. He projects his immutable Self into the play.

The Brahman is “bright” as a pure luminosity, unbroken by refractions, unmanifested in forms. The Force of the Brahman (*Tapas*) is contained and inactive. It is “bodiless”, that is, formless, undivided, equal in all things. It is “without scar”, that is, perfect and flawless, untouched by the changes and movements of creation, Itself motionless, sempiternal. It is “without sinews” that is without nerves of force. It does not pour itself out in the dynamism of life. It is “pure, unpierced by evil”. By its equality, by its inaction, the Soul remains ever free and ever pure. Sin and evil can find no place in Its eternal harmony. It is a witness of the play of Nature but takes no part in it.

Ignorance separates the human mind, life and body from the light of Sachchidānanda, and exposes man to sin and evil. But all the same, these forms of mind, life and body veiled in egoism are His, used by Him for His self-becoming. Essen-

tially the human soul is one with the Lord. In its completeness it knows this. But it assumes the lower term with its incompleteness and brings on itself pain and evil, suffering and death. Man's inner self is untouched by all these trials which only affect the surface. When he realises the Truth in him and recovers his freedom, he can take his part in the movements of nature and yet not soil himself or suffer from the results of his acts. This is the meaning of न कर्म लिप्यते नरे in the second verse. He must visualise the calm and silent Self within him. "Tranquility for the soul, activity for the energy, is the balance of the divine rhythm in man."

Let us now examine the second line of the verse. Therein in some ten words the Rishi has compressed his whole conception of creation. Creation is the becoming of the Lord, as we have seen. The totality of objects is that becoming. It is the Lord who has ordered them perfectly according to their own nature. But the Lord himself is his creation. Therefore it follows that each object in creation carries in itself the Law of its own being eternally.

All objective existence is *Purushottama*, the Self-existent, the Self-becoming, becoming by the force of the Real-Idea, the *Vijnāna* within Him. Form and action correspond to this Idea. What He visualises as the *Kavi*, what He conceives as the *Manishi*, that He becomes as the *Paribhu*. Thus, in innumerable forms in Time and Space, the Lord projects Himself as the all-pervading *Paribhu* or *Virāt*. These three operations are one, though in the relative they appear consecutive. Every form or object holds in itself the law of its own being eternally. All relations in the totality are determined by the Lord, the Inhabitant of this Jagat. Let us understand this process of self-projection clearly again. We begin with the One, unmoving and immutable. As the *Kavi* or God in the Real-Idea, He visualises the Truth in its essence, possibility and actuality. As the *Manishi* or God in the Mind, He conceives, He takes his stand on possibilities. A state of plasticity, of the inter-action of the forces, intervenes. But this is only seemingly so; for, behind the Thinker stands ever the Seer with his Divine vision. The conception of the *Manishi* eventuates in the formal becoming of the *Paribhu*. *Vidya*, the Knowledge of the One is lost in the knowledge of the Many, and the rule of *Avidya* is established. Separate Ego-sense becomes the order. From above, all this is seen in the full light of *Sachchidānanda*. But from below, man sees around him the rule of Ignorance in force, and

perceives the three principles of the process separately, not comprehensively. In the evolution of Nature man is the first creature who is equipped to climb consciously and deliberately the arduous heights to the pure radiant *Sat*. But he must know that he has to start from the very bottom, from *Avidya* and division and death, and climb up to *Vidya*, unity and immortality. In Sri Aurobindo's beautiful words,—“He is the ego in the cosmos vindicating himself as the All and the Transcendent”. This brings us to the next three verses relating to Knowledge and Ignorance.

अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येऽविद्यामुपासत ।

ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ विद्यायां रताः ॥ ९ ॥

अन्यदेवाहुर्विद्ययाऽन्यदाहुरविद्यया ।

इति शुश्रुम धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचक्षिरे ॥ १० ॥

विद्याञ्चाविद्याञ्च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह ।

अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्ययामृतमश्नुते ॥ ११ ॥

Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone. (9)

Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Knowledge, other that which comes by Ignorance ; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding. (10)

He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality. (11)

We have not much to say on *Vidya* and *Avidya*, as most of the ground has been covered already. The *Manishi* accepted *Avidya* “in order to develop individual relations to their utmost . . . . and then through these individual relations come back individually to the knowledge of the One in all.” Man is not to accept exclusively either *Vidya* or *Avidya*, either the One or

the Many. In him the Seer of the Real-Idea is standing back, and the Thinker separated from the Seer has to set about as best he can in his semi-obscurity to regain his freedom. He must first look within and face the Divine Inhabitant who is ever seated behind the outward appearance of all things, and there in His effulgent light recover by the Knowledge of the One in the many the state of Immortality. This is man's *Sādhanā*. His bondage does not lie in living and acting in his human body, but in his persistent sense of egoistic separation. His shackles are of the mind, not of the body. His aim is to supersede the mind by the Supermind and not eschew action in the body.

Purushottama is the Lord of both Vidya and Avidya, the twin powers of His Chit-Tapas, the two aspects of His Mayā. Man, when he realises the one in all, the all in one, the all as the Becomings of the One, is no longer subject to Avidya because he has recovered his freedom in the Vidya. He has to achieve the supreme accord between Knowledge and Ignorance. The purpose of the Lord in him cannot be fulfilled by following either path exclusively. This harmony he would achieve if he knows all in order to transcend all. By taking to the path of Vidya alone he is likely to enter into some special state and accept it for the whole, mistaking isolation for transcendence. If the ordinary man is ignorant by compulsion, the exclusive follower of Vidya remains ignorant by choice. He gets into a blind lane from which it is difficult to emerge. Therefore it is that the Rishi consigns him to a blinder darkness than the exclusive pursuer of the path of Avidya. For, though the latter enters into a state of greater and greater separation, a state of chaos, still for him there is reconstitution always possible, while from the attachment to Asat it is much more difficult to return to fulfilment.

In either path, however, there are special gains. By Vidya one may attain to the state of the inactive Purusha who looks on but does not participate in the manifestation. This state may bring the seeker a calm plenitude and freedom from the dualities of life. But that is not the highest goal of man. His end is not to abide in the Silent one, but in the Supreme Purusha,—He who went abroad and upholds both the stable and the unstable as two modes of His Being.

The pursuer of Avidya may attain to the status of a Titan or that of a god, say, Indra, the performer of a hundred sacrifices. Here, the individual is constantly enriched by all that the

Universe can give him, he enlarges his self far beyond that of man, but this also is not the goal of man. For though he has transcended human limits, no divine transcendence has come to such a man. For, be it remembered, the seeker has to transcend all limitations. It is not enough to transcend sorrow if he is still subject to joy. It is not enough to transcend the lower Prakriti but not the higher. Such a person will have to descend again to all that he had rejected and learn to make the right use of the trials and tribulations of human life. He who perceives the Lord in His integrality cannot be more attached to Vidya than to Avidya. This is the lore received from the ancients, as the Rishi says in the Tenth Verse.

Man can then attain his goal only by the complete path, that is, by accepting both Vidya and Avidya at the same time by realising that they are both necessary in the process of things. Neither could exist without the other; Avidya subsists because Vidya supports and embraces it; Knowledge depends upon Ignorance for the preparation of the human soul and for its progress towards the ultimate unity. The office of Knowledge is not to destroy Ignorance as something that ought never to have been, but rather to uphold it, draw it towards itself and help it to deliver itself progressively. The second line of the Eleventh Verse says that the seeker crosses beyond death by the Ignorance and by the Knowledge enjoys immortality, in other words "by Avidya fulfilled man passes beyond death, by Vidya accepting Avidya into itself he enjoys immortality". This line will be better understood when we have gone over the next three verses relating to Birth and Non-Birth. It need only be mentioned here that immortality does not mean survival of the ego after the dissolution of the body. The ego can certainly continue thereafter. The self which is unborn and undying, undoubtedly exists after the body goes, just as it had existed before the body was born. Immortality, then, means the consciousness that transcends birth and death, that is beyond all bondage and limitation, is free and blissful.

Even when this immortality has been achieved, however, the work of the individual is not over. He has yet to fulfil the Lord's work in creation. What he has realised himself he has to help others to realise. He could of course do this from some other plane, but, as Sri Aurobindo says, "Birth in the body is the most close, divine and effective form of help which the liberated can give to those . . . still . . . bound."

The next three verses relate to Birth and Non-Birth.

अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येऽसम्भूतिमुपासते ।

ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ सम्भूत्या रताः ॥ १२ ॥

अन्धदेवाहुः सम्भवादन्धदाहुरसम्भवात् ।

इति शुश्रुम धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचचक्षिरे ॥ १३ ॥

सम्भूतिञ्च विनाशञ्च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह ।

विनाशेन मृत्युं तीर्त्वा सम्भूत्याऽमृतमश्नुते ॥ १४ ॥

Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Non-Birth, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Birth alone. (12)

Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Birth, other that which comes by the Non-Birth ; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding. (13)

He who knows That as both in one, the Birth and the dissolution of Birth, by the dissolution crosses beyond death and by the Birth enjoys Immortality. (14)

The Illusionist would say that, Birth is a play of ignorance and that it cannot subsist along with entire Knowledge. In the above verses the Upanishad flatly contradicts this. He who follows Non-Birth exclusively is destined to pass into blind gloom, but into a still greater gloom will he pass who follows Birth alone. Either path could be followed with some advantage but cannot bring fulfilment to the human being. The complete path is that of him who accepts birth and dissolution at one and the same time.

Exclusive attachment to Non-Birth leads to a dissolution, into chaos or into the Void. This state is not one of transcendence, but one of annulment. From existence to non-existence—a state of ignorance, and not of release.

Exclusive attachment to Birth in the body implies an unending round of births in the lower forms of egoism, without issue, without release—an undoubtedly worse state than the former.

Still there is some good in these extreme paths. Man can follow Non-Birth as the goal of Birth and a higher existence, and enter into the Silent Brahman or into the freedom of the Non-Being. Likewise he can pursue Birth as a means of progress and self-enlargement, and enter into a fuller life which may prove to be a stepping-stone to the final goal.

But neither is man's true goal. Neither can bring him the perfect good unless it is completed by the other. Brahman is both Birth and Non-Birth just as It is both Vidya and Avidya. If the Soul is to be freed from its absorption in Nature, man must participate in the pure Unity of the God behind. So freed, the Soul then identifies itself with the Supreme Purusha, and the necessity for birth ceases. The attachment to Birth is at an end, but the freedom of becoming remains.

Thus is ego dissolved. There is no attachment to birth and the soul crosses beyond death. Released from attachment it accepts becoming in the Lord's way and enjoys immortality.

The Sage thus reiterates the injunction of the second verse. Liberated from all egoism, man accepts the world as the manifestation of the Ātman and engages in Karma as He Himself has done. Man then realises how the Lord has gone abroad and unrolled this great and intricate world as the Kavi, the Manishi, and the Paribhu, how the Swayambhu has determined eternally all things in their own nature. This determination works through His double aspects of Vidya and Avidya, of Birth and Non-Birth. The human soul develops in the multiplicity, in the play of the ignorance, and then returns to the Knowledge and by that Knowledge enjoys immortality, in this life, *Ihaiva*.

As Sri Aurobindo says, "this immortality is gained by the dissolution of the limited ego and its chain of births into the consciousness of the unborn and undying, the Eternal, the Lord, the ever-free. In short, man has to accept life in order to transcend it. The soul is really not in bondage, though in Nature it appears to be so. But it is not aware of this in its egoistic obscurity. It has to be truly conscious to realise that it is eternally free. By this consciousness, by this Light, does it cross beyond death and enjoy immortality.

The next two verses come under the heading of the Worlds —Sūrya—

हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् ।

तत् त्वं पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥ १५ ॥

पूषन्नेकर्षे यम सूर्यं प्राजापत्यं व्यूहं रश्मीन् समूहम् ।  
तेजो यत् ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यामि  
योऽसावेसौ पुरुषः सोऽहमस्मि ॥ १६ ॥

The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid ; that do thou remove, O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for sight. (15)

O Fosterer, O Sole Seer, O Ordainer, O illumining Sun, O power of the Father of Creatures, marshal thy rays, draw together thy light ; the Lustre which is thy most blessed form of all, that in Thee I behold. The Purusha there and there, He am I. (16)

Two questions that arise here are whether there are other worlds after death and whether a man after dissolution of the body is reborn, here or elsewhere. In the third verse the Rishi has spoken of dark worlds into which the slayers of the soul pass. Likewise, verses 9 and 12 speak of worlds of blind gloom and of even greater gloom. Sri Aurobindo says that it makes no difference whether the Upanishad refers to dark worlds or dark states of consciousness. We have already seen that in the Upanishadic conception a world is only a condition of conscious being. The individual soul after death must either disappear into Nature, merge itself in the Creator or continue to exist in an organisation of consciousness other than that of this earth, other than those which are proper to embodied life. These are the other worlds, the worlds after death.

After the dissolution of the body the soul can be born in another body on earth, can survive in other states, or enter into immortality beyond birth and death. Here a clear distinction is indicated. As Sri Aurobindo points out, "the two former conditions appertain to becoming ; Immortality stands in the Self, in the Non-Birth, and enjoys the Becoming". Rebirth in a terrestrial body is not explicitly mentioned in the Upanishad but is implied, specially in the seventeenth verse.

Re-birth in a better life here is not, however, offered to the seeker by the Upanishad. To be bound to birth and death is a sign that the mental being is dwelling in Avidya. But it is earthly life itself that offers the means of liberation from



bondage by one-ness with the Ātman. When that one-ness has been realised, the free soul may return to birth, not for its own sake but for that of the Lord of the World.

Likewise, the Upanishad does not hold forth any reward of beatitude in a heaven above. There is no doubt an interval between death and re-birth. During this period the soul dwells in states or worlds above, favourable or unfavourable to its further development. These worlds are either sunlit or sunless, either bright or gloomy. The one favours self-enlargement, the other self-distortion. This is the Vedantic conception of Heaven and Hell. It should be remembered, however, that life in heaven or in hell is, like the life on earth, a means and not an end. They facilitate or retard the soul's progress towards realisation. This realisation or transcendence is the true goal. But, it should be understood, transcendence does not mean rejection of that which is transcended. Self-extinction can never be the aim of a true seeker. This is where the Upanishad is near its Vedic roots. Early Vedic thought believed all life, all birth and death, all the worlds, to be here in the embodied human being. This thought, the Master remarks, has never quite passed out of Indian philosophy. But later thought has laid greater and greater stress on asceticism and renunciation.

The Rishi now proceeds to indicate the two lines of knowledge and action which lead to the supreme vision (Dṛiṣṭayē in verse 15) and the divine felicity (Rāyē in verse 18) in the form of invocations to Sūrya and Agni, the two gods of the Veda representing Divine Truth and Divine Will respectively.

It is necessary to go over the Vedic conception of the seven worlds, again in order to understand fully the place and function of Sūrya.

Spirit is Sat-chit-ananda i.e., pure Existence, pure in Self-awareness and pure in Self-delight. The terms are three in one. Sat is Chit, and Chit is Ananda. This Spirit is one, but is capable of infinite becoming by His Chit-Tapas—His conscious Force, His Will. The becoming of the Spirit is a septuple range, a sevenfold scale—three upper worlds, three lower worlds and one in between. The upper are the worlds of the Spirit—Satyaloka where Tapas energy dwells on Sat, Tapoloka where Tapas dwells in Chit and Janaloka where it dwells on Ananda. In these Lokas unity and multiplicity have not been separated. All is in all, each in all and all in each, inherently—whole consciousness is self-luminous. The light of Sūrya is lost in the

radiant one-ness of the Lord. This luminous oneness is Sūrya's most blessed form of all तेजो यत्ते रूपं कल्याणतमम् ।

The lower half consists of three worlds dominated by the three principles of Matter, Life and Mind. Bhurloka the world of formal becoming, Bhuvarloka that of free vital becoming and Swarloka that of free mental becoming. Here the Sun's rays are imprisoned in the night of inconscience or broken up, reflected from or received in limited centres.

Between the Upper and Lower halves is the intermediate world of Divine Truth—called Maharloka or the world of large consciousness. It is founded on infinite Truth. Here the multiplicity of the lower worlds always refers back to the essential unity of the worlds of the Spirit. Its principle is Vijnāna or Real-Idea. It sees at one and the same time the form as well as the being behind the form, and "therefore carries with it always the knowledge of the Truth behind the form". Its nature is Dṛiṣṭi—the supra-mental vision. This Gnosis is the Vedic Truth, the self-vision and all-vision of Sūrya.

The face of this radiant Truth is covered with a golden lid, at least so it appears to the human mind. Man is a mental being, and his sight is made up of his mental concepts and perceptions. The mind sees only the outer form of a thing, not the Dweller in the form.

The concepts of the mind are brilliant enough, but till they are replaced by the self-vision of Sūrya man cannot arrive at the true Truth. That is why the Rishi is calling upon the Sun to remove the lid, golden though it be, and disclose the Law of the Truth.

Man carries in his mind, limited and semi-obscure as it is, the seed of the supreme Truth which inspite of so many obstacles, inspite of all the differentiation and division, is ever leading him slowly along the path to realisation. The Sage wishes to hasten the pace and invokes the intervention of Sūrya.

He meditates on the Sun in his many aspects and prays to him to marshal his rays and to draw together his light. Sūrya is Pūshan, the fosterer who enlarges man's limited being into an Infinite Consciousness. He is the sole Seer who sees oneness in multiplicity and who gives man his own Self-vision, All-vision. He is Yama the ordainer who governs man's actions by the Law of the Truth. He is Prajāpati, the Lord who is the Being behind all becomings and who at the same time far exceeds his own becoming.

The radiant vision opens the seer's eyes. The rays of the Sun distorted, broken, and disordered in the divided mind are cast in the right order and relation and drawn together to disclose the Supreme Truth. The seer sees the Purushottama in all beings and in ecstasy, cries out, "The Purusha there and there, He am I". He has seen the One who is All and who transcends the All.

But in Immortality both consciousness and life are included. Knowledge is incomplete without action—Chit without Tapas. By the door of the Sun, Sūryadvāreṇa, the Sage has reached full consciousness. He now invokes Agni, the Force or Will of the Divine.

वायुरनिलममृतमथेदं भस्मान्तं शरीरम् ।

ॐ क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर क्रतो स्मर कृतं स्मर ॥ १७ ॥

अग्ने नय सुपथा राये अस्मान् विश्वानि देव वयूनानि विद्वान् ।

युयोध्यस्मज्जुहुराग्नेनो भूयिष्ठां ते नम उक्ति विधेम ॥ १८ ॥

The Breath of Things is the immortal Life, but of the body ashes are the end. Om! O Will, remember, that which was done remember? O Will, remember, that which was done remember. (17)

O god Agni, knowing all things that are manifested, lead us by the good path to the felicity; remove from us the devious attraction of Sin. To thee completest speech of submission we would dispose. (18)

Man's mind being cramped and narrow, his action is, in Sri Aurobindo's words, "crooked, many-branching, hesitating and fluctuating in its impulsion and direction". But as his mind is not wholly dark, and as there is in him always a seed of truth, he stumbles, gropes and beats about among untruths in search of truth, puts the fragments of his conceptions and perceptions together to form some kind of totality to guide him in his action. As he is constituted, he is unable to walk by himself on the straight path to felicity.

When by the door of the Sun the Sage has had a vision of the Truth, he refuses to be tossed about any longer by sin and

error, suffering and falsehood. He calls on the Divine Will for guidance—the Will that knows all. He prays to Agni “Thou knowest all, lead me by the straight path to felicity. Show me the crookedness of the path of sin”.

By the light of Sūrya, he has learnt to discriminate between his life and his body. He affirms boldly that the body is subject to dissolution, ashes are its end, but the breath of Life is immortal. This Life-principle is Vāyu or Mātariswan of the Veda who has already been visualised in verse 4. He it is who calls down the Divine Will from the upper regions into the realm of mind, life and body. The body is but an outer tool. Immortal man must not identify himself with it. Birth and death are powers of the body, not of life. Mātariswan runs through our successive bodily existences like a thread, and maintains our action from life to life. But the presiding deity is not Mātariswan, but Agni—not Life-principle, but Will. This Will is Kratu of the seventeenth verse, the power behind the act. It is the energy of consciousness. Man, owing to his limitations, uses but imperfectly his consciousness. He lives from hour to hour, aided by his imperfect faculty of memory. The Upanishad solemnly invokes the Will to remember the thing done, so as to be conscious of the mystery of becoming, and thus guide what he calls his destiny. Man will then no longer be like a rudderless boat tossed about by currents and winds, but will be able to guide effectively his future course. His mental Will, Kratu, will then become the Will of the Divine, Agni.

For this he has to submit unreservedly to the Divine Will and make a complete surrender to it. This the Sage does by the closing phrase, **ते नम उक्ति विधेम ।**

Knowledge of the Supreme Lord and submission to Him are the two golden keys that open the shining gates of Immortality. The gates are now open. The Seer, released from bondage by the radiant rays of the Sun, guided by the divine Fire, is able to reach the summit of his evolution, and to fulfil the Lord in his now divinised mind, life and body. Realisation is complete. A divine centre has been created.

Such is the Siddhi of the Sage of the Upanishad. Today the cycle is complete, and we know that what the Seer realised will now in a new age be realised by the whole of humanity awakened to the realisation of Supreme Unity.

# Sri Aurobindo and Tantra

(2)\*

—EVOLUTION OF WORDS AND MANTRA—

BY BIRENDRAKISHORE ROY CHOWDHURY

MEN express their thoughts and experiences through speech. So the words and speech of men are usually regarded as an easy means of communication. But what is expressed in speech or writing is only the gross practical part of the word. The form of the word that we see ordinarily is only its most external form. There are hidden in the world, behind this gross external form, many great truths, and they can only be discovered by deep *sādhana*. In all the great spiritual disciplines of the world there is, in some form or other, a hint about the mystery of *Vāk* or *Shabda* (sound). In India the original power of *Shabda* was discovered in Mantravidyā or Science of Mantra. Indian Mantravidyā is like a vast ocean. We shall deal with the subject here briefly and simply and shall also try to understand in what light Sri Aurobindo has seen the Science of Mantra.

In spite of all its efforts, history has not yet been able to ascertain definitely how language appeared in the history of mankind. Scientists are of opinion that when man from the barbarous and animal condition first saw the light of civilisation, the words used by him were very few in number. When man was little more than an animal in human form, he could, like other animals, utter only a very few sounds, and could not speak any other word. Often at that time he made efforts to express himself through gestures. At first the names only of a few things were created, and the use of particular sounds to denote particular objects began. Slowly the number of these sounds increased and language began to be created.

We find a tradition in the Bible and a few other Scriptures that in the beginning mankind had only one language. But

\* For the first part of the article on this subject see pp. 72-88 of the previous volume.

Science does not find any evidence that at the beginning human civilisation originated in one place. Probably fifteen thousand years ago there was the evidence of the existence of man all over the globe. At that time men lived in different parts of the earth and evolved different characteristics. Certain general characteristics of men also appeared at that time. On account of differences in country, climate and surroundings men of white, black, brown and other complexions also appeared at the same time. Either in some one place the original ancestors of all mankind first appeared, and then their increasing progeny spreading over different countries acquired different forms in different climes ; or, at the very beginning, different types of men appeared in different parts of the earth ; scientists have not yet arrived at any definite conclusion in this respect. If it be a fact that mankind had its origin in one particular place on the earth and one race had first evolved one language, then only the pre-historic existence of a universal language spoken of in the Bible can be accepted. But scientific investigation has not yet found any specific evidence of this.

It is probable that the centres of human habitation were at first only in two or three mainlands ; there arose two or three original languages. Two or three main strains of the original human race spread into different countries, and their progeny living in many centres developed many languages. But among all these many languages we can find the stuff of two or three original ones,—each original language has influenced the development of its own branches. Of course, this conclusion of scientific investigators may not be true in all respects, because we are still in the primary stage of the science of language ; it has not yet gone beyond its infancy like other branches of physical science.

Investigation into the gradual development of different ancient civilisations reveals also the line which the development of language has followed. Some races like the Chinese did not at all feel the necessity of an alphabet in the use of words and sounds. Most other peoples have made use of the alphabet. In the development of writing the contribution of Sumerian and Egyptian civilisation is not inconsiderable. If we look at the development of the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Mongolian and various modern languages, beginning from the most ancient languages of the Aryans, Sumerians, Egyptians and other ancient races, we can discover the conditions and the law of the development of language. It does not require much effort to see that word-sounds have not been formed haphazardly by the

imagination of men—there is a natural organic law and system in their development.

Thus Sri Aurobindo wrote in *The Secret of the Vedas*, which appeared serially in the *Arya*: “My researches first convinced me that words, like plants, like animals are in no sense artificial products, but growths—living growths of sound with certain seed-sounds as their basis.” (Chapter V). In another place he writes: “Whatever may be the deeper nature of speech, in its outward manifestation as human language, it is an organism, a growth, a terrestrial evolution” (*ibid.*). Words are a part of the natural development of human nature. In the use of words we find an indication of the formation of a man’s mind ; but man’s mentality also is a part of Nature. As all things in Nature are subject to the laws of uniformity and causation, so man’s mind also is shaped according to the law of causality ; the psychology of man does not follow his caprice or any mental rules framed by him ; like the bodily formation of man, his mental formation is also determined according to a natural law and develops gradually. It is not true that the mass of words and sounds constituting a language have been invented by the imagination of men or that men have by mutual consultation determined words and their significances for the convenience of communication. There is a natural evolution of sounds and words. We find that the voice of a particular species of animal is uniform in all the members of the species—it is the natural utterance of that kind of animal and that depends on the vocal system of that species. There are also sounds naturally uttered by the human throat—with the development of the mentality, these natural sounds also develop and become clearer ; with the many-sided development of the mind these sounds develop into words, sentences and language. In this way men brought up in different climates and countries naturally develop different kinds of language. So it is said that the original condition of all languages was natural and spontaneous.

Sri Aurobindo has said: “It (speech) contains indeed a constant psychological element and is therefore more free, flexible, consciously self-adaptive than purely physical organisms. . . . But law and process exist in mental, no less than in material phenomena in spite of their more volatile and variable appearances. Law and process must have governed the origins and developments of language.” (*Ibid*, Chap. V). It is true that the development of the mind does not follow a fixed and a too rigid law like the body, still there is a law of the subtler and conscious

development of the mind, and that law also is natural. The mental processes of man are also formed out of Nature, and words have naturally come into existence and developed as a medium of the expression of those processes. For example, when the human infant cries as soon as it is born, the *dhvani* (sound) that comes out of its throat is always of the same kind. Moreover, every child calls its mother by the sound "Ma", it rises spontaneously from its throat. The relation of the child with its mother is naturally expressed by the sound "Ma". The child recognises its mother first of all ; then the more it makes its acquaintance with the world and with other people, the more it tries to express it in various sounds. A little close observation shows that there is a general uniformity in the natural utterances of infants. As infants grow into adults in the course of natural development, so also primitive peoples have turned into cultured humanity following a natural course of development. The evolution of the human languages is only a history of the evolution of the racial mind and its nature. An investigation into this history shows that the mind of man was at first bound to the external senses and sense-experiences. The centre of the sense-experiences of man lies in his brain and the nervous system ; so the main functions of the primitive mind were to have external experiences and to respond to them. The original language of man was nothing more than a natural by-product of the actions and reactions of his nervous system. The late Sir John Woodroffe observed in his book, *The Garland of Letters* : "Physiologically each single vibration acting on the ear, nerves and brain centres, produces a single pulse of agitation, a single nerve-shock, just as a single tap on the door produces a single shock and this again a single sound. This single pulse of brain excitement ought to produce a single pulse of feeling, a feeling stem or feeling element," . . . (Chapter IX). It is obvious that this feeling element of the primitive man is confined within his nervous system. So Sri Aurobindo also has said: ". . . . The factor which presided over the development of language was the association by the nervous-mind of the primitive man of certain general significances. . . . The process of the association was also in no sense artificial but natural, governed by simple and definite psychological laws."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the natural language of man originated from his primitive nature ; that was the language of the natural reactions

<sup>1</sup> The Secret of the Vedas, Chapter V.



rising from the external touches of Nature. *Varnamāla* or the letters of the alphabet and what Sri Aurobindo has called the "seed-sounds" or *Vija Shabda* were born in this way. The letters of the alphabet are the original stuff of all the sound-symbols in the Tantric *sādhana*; but the importance of the alphabet as the original stuff of language also has been recognised by most peoples. The alphabet arose from the different places and movements of vocal utterance. The guttural, labial, dental and other original sounds associated with particular places formed the alphabet. Sir John Woodroffe observes: "This subject of the *Varnas* occupies an important place in the Tantra-Shastras in which it is sought to give a practical application to the very ancient doctrine concerning *Shabda*. The letters are classified according to their places of pronunciation such as gutturals, labials, dentals and so forth. The lips, mouth and throat form a pipe or musical instrument which being formed in various ways and by the aid of the circumbient air produces the various sounds which are the letters of the Alphabet. . . . The vowels are continuous sounds formed by varying the size of the mouth cavity." (*The Garland of Letters*, Chapter VI).

When the child calls its parents as "Ma" or "Baba" it pronounces spontaneously the different letters of the alphabet; the primitive men also in their attempt to communicate different kinds of nervous experiences created unknowingly many letters of the alphabet. From these arose the seed-sounds or *Vija Shabdas*. The original seed-roots developed out of those seed-sounds. The meaning of these root-words was not limited to any particular objects, they signified particular movements of Nature, particular qualities or classes. Of course these primary root-words were very few in number, and they gave expression to the primary nervous experiences of men. Sri Aurobindo has dealt with this subject comprehensively in *The Secret of the Vedas*: "Out of these seed-sounds develop a small number of primitive root-words . . . they were rather the vocal equivalents of certain general sensations and emotion-values. It was the nerve and not the intellect which created speech . . . in consequence, the word generally was not fixed to any precise idea. It had a general character or quality (*guṇa*) which was capable of a great number of applications . . . And this *guṇa* and its result it shared with many kindred sounds." (Chapter V.)

At the first stage of evolution the mind of man was limited to the physical and vital experiences and needs. All the experiences of the body and the life were centred in the actions

of the nervous system. Only when men rose to the second stage of evolution they began to cultivate properly their intellectual faculties. Then men learned to understand every thing by throwing the light of the intellect on his senses, on all his experiences and surroundings, and then the specific form of every object became clear to his mind. It is through the dispensation of Nature that the primitive men, immersed in the sense-life, awoke into mental intelligence and learned to comprehend the laws of the mutual relations of the senses and their objects. He gradually came to understand the class to which any particular object belonged and also the specific characteristics of different classes. It was at that time that the words of mankind increased in number and its language was created. A study of the evolution of the Sanskrit language shows that in primitive times men used root-words similar in quality but having many significances ; but as intellectual discrimination developed, the use of words also changed with it and they became fixed, well-defined and clear in significance. Man thus awakened the intellectual mind out of the physical and the vital mind—the primitive language, born out of nervous vibrations was chastened and reformed in the light of intellectual discrimination and thus was created the “Sanskrit” language. The term “Sanskrita” means reformed and chastened—it is a natural “*Samskāra*” born out of intelligence and genius. That is why Sri Aurobindo observed: “The intellectual use of language has developed by a natural law out of the sensational and emotional.” (*The Secret of the Vedas*, Chapter V.) Of course this reformation was at one time carried out in all civilised tongues—Greek, Latin and other ideal languages are instances of this ; but the evolution and the gradual reformation of words has nowhere been so clearly evident as in the Indian Aryan Sanskrit language. But taking a broad view, we can see the same law operating in all languages of all civilisations. In the languages which are predominantly intellectual, the thoughts of men express themselves through description, analysis, classification, judgment and such other mental activities. Often thoughts instead of arising simultaneously with the perception of objects arise as after-construction as a memory of the objects ; it is then that thought and language are created. In the creation of language men use natural names and sounds as well as artificial and imaginative ones. In the naming of natural things and qualities primitive natural names are found in all languages—all these words are class-names ; but when men give particular names to the individuals belonging to

a class, these become imaginative and artificial. Thus *Mānusha* or "Man" signifies the human race. It agrees with the primitive word ; but such names as *Rāma*, *Jadu*, *Bepin* refer to particular individuals belonging to the human race—these names are artificial and imaginative. As many such individual names are found in the language which are shaped by the intellect, so new compound words are also continually formed out of particular primitive words—in all languages the creation and assumption of new words is accomplished with the help of the intellect. In this way thoughts are given form with the help of natural and artificial words and names in every language. It is the aim of all human thought to describe things and to determine their qualities and mutual relations—languages are the mediums of this thought. The creations of the thought-world lead to the evolution of language. And it is only when thought develops in the human mind that man rises from the state of involution in nervous physical and vital experiences and grows into thoughtful and cultured beings regulated by the mind and the reason. The mass of words spoken and written by such men are known as language. But this evolution of human words and language has not stopped with thought, it has gone far beyond thought. It is rather surprising that at the very first stage of history men suddenly discovered a higher evolution of words. When on one side uncultured men were trying to give expression to their natural and physical experiences through words, at that very time on another side the ancient Rishis or illumined seers of the world received supernatural divine truths and truth-experiences and gave rhythmic expression to them through divine *Mantras*. These truths are unthinkable, they are far above thought, imagination and mental intelligence. The ancients experienced these truths with the help of supra-intellectual intuition. They gave form to intuition with the help of the Mantra. The Mantras are the language above thought and above mental intelligence.

The ancients said that these Mantras were not composed by any one—they had only been discovered through spiritual experience ; they even said that the creation of the world became possible from these impersonal Mantras.

How can the creation of the world proceed from words? To physical science such statements are a riddle. But if we look at the matter without any bias, we can see the underlying truth. Science has shown that the world of sense-experience is born out of ether. Ether is full of the vibrations of an unseen Energy,

it is this Energy that through different vibrations has resulted in this world. But where there is Energy and the movement of Energy, sound also must be there. A motionless thing is silent, but as soon as there is movement there inevitably comes in the quality of sound. As we cannot see the form of this unseen Cosmic Force with our gross eyes, so we cannot hear the sound of the movement of this Energy with our gross ears ; but there can be no reasonable doubt that the movement of sound accompanies this movement of energy. There cannot but be sound vibrations in all creation and creative movement in the universe. It is for this reason that the ancient Greeks said that there was a music going on in the movement of the stars and planets—this they called the Music of the Spheres.

Though we cannot hear these *dhvanis* or sounds by our physical ears, they can be heard by the subtle ear in Yogic experience. Science, engaged in the search for all facts and principles of the universe with the help of instruments and logical reasoning, has arrived today at the limit of its investigations ; it is realising that perceptual experience cannot give any inmost truth. Thus a time is coming when Science, realising its limitations, will have to approach the Yogis for the direct experience of truth.

Though the Rishis and seers of ancient times made no extensive investigations of the physical world and had no elaborate instruments for that purpose, they perceived many subtle truths through Yogic experience. They had this direct realisation of truth through intuition gained by Yoga. It was as a result of this kind of realisation that they said that the world was created from the Word, from the Mantra. That there can be a sound or *dhvani* of the vibration of the unseen power creating the world, we can easily understand—but what has that got to do with the Mantra? This aspect of the matter requires some consideration.

It is laid down in the Scriptures that Brahmā created the world from the Veda—the ordinary man will understand this to mean that at one time the great-grand father Brahmā recited the Vedic Mantras and immediately the world was created from top to bottom. Such stories may delight children ; so Western scholars regard this account as old superstition or fanciful imagination of the ancients to entertain the minds of the illiterate rustic people. But instead of taking this conception only at its face value, its easy outward sense, we should find out the real truth at which it aims. Somebody created the world by

repeating the Vedic Mantras or the Mantras resounding by themselves gave birth to the earth and the heavens—such statements of the matter would indeed appear like Puranic fables. But from the philosophical point of view this conception is not so facile or ridiculous.

Many systems of Indian Philosophy have held the view that the Veda was born at the beginning of creation and that the Veda consists of impersonal Mantras. The production of sound simultancously with the movement of the creative energy is natural ; but this movement is conscious, and the sound produced by this movement is associated with meaning and conception. These impersonal conceptual sounds were naturally born simultaneously with the movement of creation ; afterwards objects were produced. Veda is conceptual word, and things are the *Artha* (objects) of that word or *Shabda*. It is from this point of view that it is said that the universe originated from the Veda. We shall further understand the real meaning of this statement if we give attention to the word "Veda". "Veda" means knowledge. The knowledge of the world and the transcendent is Veda. In the Veda all knowledge had been given through the natural seed-names of the known objects. Physical science cannot see any knowledge or conscious action behind the whole universe—the scientists think that at first an inconscient force created the material world ; afterwards came vague feelings of pleasure and pain in plants, sense-experience in animals and finally mind, intellect, discernment and knowledge in men. In matter, first, the vibration of life appeared in plants and animals ; afterwards, mind and mental reasoning appeared in man—this is the account of the evolution of knowledge given by Western Physical Science. But the ancient seers and philosophers have held that consciousness did not appear only in the course of world evolution in men, there is a great conscient state behind the unseen Power that has originated this world. Thus the Samkhya put the *Mahat Tattwa* or the Universal Consciousness at the very beginning of its account of the creation of the world.

If the entire Universal Force be driven by consciousness and if there be a conscient universal Being somewhere, then it must be admitted that the universe has been created by the universal force from the universal consciousness of that Being. The Ancients said that God is that Being. His universal consciousness is the ultimate source of the universal creation and *Vāk*, Mantra or Veda is the form of that consciousness, as *Shabda*,

conception, *Artha*, all these principles are inherent in His consciousness.

In describing how the Father of this universe created the universe, not only Indians but prophets, seers and philosophers of other countries also have in many cases said that God first expresses His conception of the universe in *Shabda* or Word. The world has been created simultaneously with the creation of the Word. The Hindus call this conceptual Word, *Vāk* or Veda; other races have also spoken of the Word in other languages. Sir John Woodroffe made a comparative study of this subject from which we briefly quote the following:

"This notion of the Word is very ancient. God speaks the Word and the things appear. Thus the Hebrew word for light is "Aur". Genesis says: 'God said, Let there be (Aur) light, and there was light (Aur)'. The Divine Word is conceived of in the Hebrew Scriptures as having creative power. A further stage of thought presents to us the concept of an aspect of the Supreme Person who creates. Thus we have the Supreme and the Logos, Brahman and Shabdabrahman. In Greek, Logos means thought and the word which denotes the object of thought. To Heraclitus, Logos was the principle underlying the universe. . . According to Plato, the Logoi were super-sensual primal images or patterns (*jāti*) of visible things . . . According to Philo Ideas moulded matters. God first produced the intelligible world of Ideas which are types of the physical world. Though in itself nothing but Logos, the latter is the author of the ideal world. The Author of the Fourth Gospel took up these ideas but gave them expression in such a way as to serve Christian theological needs . . . The Fourth Gospel opens grandly—'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.'—These are the very words of Veda: *Prajāpatir vai idamāśīt*. In the beginning was Brahman—*Tasya vāg dvilīyā āsīt*, with whom was Vāk or the Word." (*The Garland of Letters*, Chapter I.)

We find in the Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad:

*sa tayā vācā tena ātmanā idam sarvam asṛjata.*

God created all this universe by that Vāk and by that Self. The Taittiriya Brahmana says: Immutable Vāk, the first-born of the Truth, is the nave of Immortality. (T. B. 2. 8. 8. 5.) In the Shatapatha Brahmana Vāk has been called the eternal and universal worker and the source of all creatures—*vāg vai ajo*

vaco prajā visvakarmā. It is stated in the Shaiva Agama that Pashupati Mahādeva created the universe by the Vākrapini Shakti. (Muir's 'Original Sanskrit Texts, Verse 39.)

This Vāk at the source of God's conceptive creation—this is the Veda, the Shabda-Brahman. But the Vedic mantras we utter by the mouth—did God create the universe uttering these very mantras exactly as they are? Though many ignorant Pandits of this country hold this view, the matter is not so unscientific and crude. Moreover, people of other countries may legitimately regard it as unbelievable that God created this world uttering the Vedic mantras of the Aryan land. So the surface meaning of the saying that the world was created from the Veda cannot be accepted. We have to find out its inner philosophical truth. That is why the Tantric Scriptures elucidating the mystery of the Mantra, have clearly explained in all detail the origin of Shabda-Brahman or Vāk. The Tantra says that the word we utter by the mouth is called the *Vaikhari*. That word is the external utterance of the *Shabda* which is associated with our thought or imagination. All our mental states are given outer expression by *Vaikhari Shabda* (spoken speech); but the *Shabda* with the help of which the mind carries on its thoughts, that mentally uttered *Shabda* is called *Madhyamā*. Common people understand only these two manifestations of *Madhyamā* and *Vaikhari* sounds. But besides being the medium of practical thoughts, *Madhyamā* sounds have also inward movements.

The ordinary thoughts of men are grouped around ordinary external objects, and mental movements are carried on with the help of sounds connected with external objects. But when men give up all thoughts of external objects and turn inward, then internal subtle *tattvas* are revealed to their vision. Behind the gross world made up of the gross earth, air, water, fire and ether, there exist subtle principles which are seen by Yogis. Besides the words we use in connection with the gross world, there are many sounds arising from the experiences of the subtle world; they are not exactly the words of practical use. That is why when a man tries to utter by the mouth the sounds heard in subtle experience during deep meditation, these cannot be exactly like those subtle sounds, they are bound to be like the gross speech of his practical use. So when a person expresses any subtle *tattva* by the mouth in some *shabda* or *mantra*, it must be understood that that *shabda* or *mantra* is only somewhat similar to the *shabda* that was heard internally. The Tantra has many *Vija-mantras*, they are all gross sounds somewhat similar to

sounds heard in the subtle world. Gross and subtle sounds can never be altogether the same. The same subtle sounds can be expressed in two ways, in two different kinds of words by men belonging to two different countries according to the difference in their *samskāra* or tradition. That is why different kinds of mantras are in vogue in different countries. But that does not matter; it is the clearness of the experience that is to be appreciated. All these subtle sounds also are included in the *Madhyamā* sounds spoken of by the Tantra; when the experience of these sounds becomes concentrated and continuous, the *sādhaka* can hear the *Anāhata Dhvani* in his inmost heart. It is from *Anāhata Shabda* that all other subtle sounds have been created. Again, above the subtle world there is the *kārana jagat*, the causal world, out of which all the subtle and gross things in existence, immovable and movable, have been created. The *sādhaka* entering into the causal world can see clearly the process of the origination of the world. That is a *jñānamaya jagat*, a world of Knowledge. That world has its own words of Knowledge. With the advent of knowledge, the sounds revealing that knowledge are also heard. These sounds are called *Pashyanti Shabda* by the Tantra. *Pashyanti Shabda* is above *Madhyamā Shabda*. The Vedas, the store of knowledge, suggest the *Pashyanti Shabda*. About the Tantric conception of the development of *Pashyanti*, *Madhyamā* and *Vaikhari* sounds Sri Aurobindo thus writes in *Future Poetry*: "It is this force, this *Shakti*, to which the old Vedic thinkers gave the name of *Vāk*, the goddess of creative speech, and the Tantric psychists supposed that this power acts in us through different subtle nervous centres on higher and higher levels of its force, and that thus the word has a gradation of its expressive powers of Truth and Vision. One may accept as a clue of great utility this idea of different degrees of the force of speech, each separately characteristic and distinguishable, and recognise one of the grades of the Tantric classification, *Pashyanti*, the seeing word." (*The Future Poetry*, Chap. "The Word and the Spirit").

The Tantras teach the method of uplifting *Prakṛti* or Nature. *Kundalini Shakti* is *Prakṛti*. The *kundalini* has to be raised from the bottom to the top through the different nervous centres in the human body; for this purpose Tantric *sādhaks* often do mantra *japa* (repetition) and mantra *dhyāna* (meditation). As a result of meditation on different nervous centres, *kundalini* residing in different centres, the *japa* of the *mantra* also becomes different. The gross uttered *mantra* is



called *vaikhari*; the subtle *mantra* is called *madhyamā*; and above that the luminous *mantra* as *vāk*, is called *pashyanti*. It goes without saying that the real sound-form of the subtle *mantra* and the *pashyanti vāk* can never be uttered by us by the mouth; but the *mantra* uttered by the mouth can be shaped in the mould of subtle experience and truth-experience. As some natural words are formed by the vibrations of our external sense-experience so also as a natural reaction of inner experience some *vaikhari mantras* of a somewhat similar kind are created in different languages in different countries; and these are called *mantras*. The *mantras* of the Veda and the Tantra were all created in this way. The *vāk* or *mantra* experienced in higher planes is not a creation of the mind of man; that is a natural manifestation of truth; that is why it is called impersonal; and when a *mantra* corresponding to that experience is created by the mind or mouth of man, that is accepted as impersonal *mantra* as it depends on impersonal experience even though it has been mixed up with the personal effort of man. Here the word impersonal is used in a relative sense. It is thus that we find the philosophical basis of *Apaurashayavād*. Sri Aurobindo has said: "The Rishi was not the individual composer of the hymn but the seer of an eternal truth and an impersonal knowledge. The language of Veda itself is *sruti*—a rhythm not composed by the intellect but heard, a divine word that came vibrating out of the Infinite to the inner audience of the man who had previously made himself fit for the impersonal knowledge." (*The Secret of the Vedas*, Chapter II).

When impersonal knowledge of truth becomes revealed to direct divine vision, when divine sounds expressing that knowledge are heard (*sruta*), these sounds constitute what is called the *Sruti*. So by *pashyanti vāk* we understand divine *sruti*. But in the Vedic age the *srutis* were addressed to the gods worshipped in sacrificial ceremonies. As these divine *srutis* were expressed in *Vaikhari* speech so spiritual truths also were expressed in the terms of sacrifice that were in vogue at that time, as in that age sacrifice occupied a pre-eminent place in the practical religion of man. The entire Vedic civilisation centred round the *yajna* or the sacrifice. Thus the spiritual truths of the *sruti* were expressed in the terms of the Vedic gods and the Vedic rites. We have already said that the language of man at that time had a many-sided significance. Words and language were then created not to denote particular objects or particular principles, but sameness or similarity in quality. It is this creation that

was called the natural creation of words. Things or principles which possess the common quality inherent in particular activities were denoted by one word. For instance, the word "*Agni*" signifies external fire as well as the fire of internal *tapasyā*. The term *Agni* was the natural word for all things which gave to men the feeling of heat. We have also said that the language of that time was based not so much on thought as on experience ; so all objects or principles which gave the experience of a particular quality were known by the same word. As a result of this, there was in the Vedic language on one side a description of the natural gods connected with sacrifice, on the other hand there was another significance containing the secret of the Veda—an exposition of the spiritual principles which have the same attributes as those of the natural gods. So Sri Aurobindo says: "The Vedic hymns were concerned and constituted on these principles. Their formulas of ceremonies are, overtly, the details of an outward ritual devised for the Pantheistic Nature-worship which was the common religion, covertly, the sacred words, the effective symbols of a spiritual experience and knowledge . . . . In sober truth, the Vedanta, Purana, Tantra, the philosophical schools and the great Indian religions do go back in their source to Vedic origin." (*The Secret of the Vedas*, Chapter I). The same word or name then signified a natural god and a spiritual principle ; again the performance of sacrificial ceremonies and the search for spiritual truths were at that time carried on simultaneously. There was a natural harmony between Vedic sacrifice and Vedic Yoga.

When Tantric *sādhana* was shaped by Tantric scriptures in Sanskrit, Tantric *Vija mantras* also were used at that time. In that age the language of men was not merely based on experience, it had become intellectual ; that was contemporaneous with the age of philosophy. The Science of Grammar also had reached a high level at that time. That is why the *mantras* of the Tantra were formed on the basis of language as determined by Grammar. The Tantric *sādhaka* learnt by experience that the sounds that are heard when one meditates on the essential condition of all worldly and subtle *tattwas* have a similarity with the letters of the alphabet. So the Tantric *sādhakas* began to express all worldly and transcendent principles and truths with the help of the letters of the alphabet. These were called by them the *Vija mantras*. They advanced in *sādhana* as well as in spiritual knowledge with the help of these *mantras* which

are as living and full of creative power as the Vedic *mantras*. Such alphabetical seed-symbols (*Vija-mantras*) were in vogue also among other races.

The origin of the Tantric as well as the Vedic *mantra*, however, is to be found in one and the same *mantra*. Both these systems accepted the *Om* as the source and beginning of all *mantras*. This *Om* is the centre of all *Pashyanti Shabdas*. This is the *Kārana Shabda* or the causal sound. It is called the cause of all as it comes first of all. The state from which the gross and the subtle worlds have arisen is the causal state, and that is a state full of consciousness and knowledge. The power of this knowledge is the fundamental source of the universal creation. As this power is full of knowledge, it is the *Pashyanti Shakti*, and the vibrational sound of this Shakti is the "*Om*". However the *Om* that we utter by the mouth or think with the mind is not the real sound of *Om*. The real *Om* is the *dhvani* or sound belonging properly to the causal world; that cannot be heard unless one reaches that region, and that cannot be uttered by the mouth. That can be heard by the divine ear and its light can be seen by the divine vision.

But the *pashyanti* is not the ultimate; the Tantra speaks of an utterly supreme state of *shabda* which is the first movement of Brahman—Tantra calls that the *parā*. *Parā vāk* is at the root of all creation; wherever it is said that God created by the *vāk*, it is to be understood as the *parā vāk*. The Tantra, the Upanishad, the Veda, the Bible and all other *Srutis* have eulogised this *vāk* as the direct manifestation of God. *Parā vāk* is the original source of all *Srutis*. If we call the *pashyanti shabda* the *jnānamaya* or seeing word, of the causal world, then *parā vāk* has to be called the great cause or the *viijnāna*. It is not difficult to understand that there is some sound in every movement; soundless movement or vibration is an impossibility. So when at the time of the direct manifestation of God there is a first movement of his creative power, at that very time a natural sound of *viijnāna* or *viijnānamayi shakti* arises, and that is the *Parā vāk*. *Parā vāk* is the vibration sound of *parā prakṛti* or *Ishvara-Shakti*. This *parā vāk* or the supreme *shabda* has been called the *Mahānāda* in the Tantra. In Tantric terminology *shaktipāta* or causal stress also refers to this. *Mahānāda* as the first movement of Shakti is the first manifestation of God and from that is born *Parābindu*. *Parābindu* is a concentrated and more developed state of *Mahānāda*; and it is from *Parābindu*

that the *Om* is born, so says the Tantra. These things have been clearly explained in the *Sharada-Tilak Tantra*:

सच्चिदानन्द विभवात् सकलात् परमेश्वरात्  
आसीत् शक्तिस्ततो नादः नादाद्विन्दु समुद्भवः  
परशक्तिमयः साक्षात् त्रिधासौ भिद्यते पुनः  
विन्दु नादबीजमिति तस्य भेदाः समीरिताः ।

सारदा तिलकतन्त्र ।

The *Vija mantra Om* is the sound symbol of the universal creation. In the course of analysing this, the Tantra has revealed the mystery of creation. Sachchidānanda Parameshvara first manifests himself as *Parānāda* through his *Shakti*. It is *Parānāda* which being concentrated turns into *Parābindu*. *Parābindu* becomes threefold and gives rise to *Bindunāda* and *Vijātmaka Pranava* or the *OM*: all *Srutis* follow the *Om*. Here *Parānāda* and *Parābindu* really signify *Parā Vāk*. Again, the *Om* rising out of *Parābindu* manifests the *Pashyanti Vāk*. It goes without saying that all this is an attempt to describe through sound-symbols the process of the gradual manifestation of a Truth which is beyond mind and speech. So we have to look at the truth underlying the symbols. It is not sufficient to look at the gross *mantra*. The Veda also says that the word has four status, three of which are hidden behind, only the fourth one is spoken by man (*Rig Veda*, I. 164). *Parā vāk* is beyond the mind and the intelligence; it is unthinkable, supramental; *Pashyanti* is above the mind and the intelligence, so we can call it the Overmind. Sri Aurobindo has described supramental knowledge as the direct manifestation of Truth and *Ishvara Shakti*; the Overmental is the second stage of the creative drive of *Shakti* after this first moving forth; it is out of this stage that the knower, the knowledge and the known and all other things in the world have been created. The working of knowledge is associated with sound; so all sound symbols and sound concepts rise from the Overmind, then they are manifested in the language formed by the mind and the intellect, and lastly in uttered speech.

All unmanifest, unthinkable, spiritual, illumined *shabdās* are changed in the mental mould when they are expressed in uttered speech. Those who can bring the unmanifest divine

word into uttered speech are the Rishis. Seated in the higher consciousness, they see divine truths through Revelation ; they hear the *dhvani* of divine truths through inspiration, and they express these as *mantras* through the uttered speech of the illumined mind and intelligence. About this mantra Sri Aurobindo says: "There is also a speech, a supramental word, in which the higher knowledge, vision or thought can clothe itself within us for expression." (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, Chapter LXX).

Though all *mantras* of all Rishis may not be expressive of the highest truth, in the *mantras* of many Rishis in the world there are expressions of intuitions and intuitive experiences which are below the Supermind and the Overmind. So Sri Aurobindo writes in Future Poetry: "The inspired word comes, as said of the old Vedic seers, from the home of truth, *sadanāt īlasya*. The word comes secretly from above the mind but it is plunged first into our intuitive depths and emerges imperfectly to be shaped by the poetic feeling and intelligence . . . the more we can bring in of its direct power of vision the more intuitive and illumined becomes the word of our utterance." (*The Future Poetry*, chap. "The Word and the Spirit"). The sound form of the higher truth has to be received without allowing it to be deformed or distorted by the mental intellect or lower experiences, the mind and the vital have to be opened as pure and transparent channels for the expression of the truth ; only then we can find a pure speech-form of the truth even in the gross word. The more a man approaches the Intuition, the more illumined vision and poetic quality appear in his speech and writing ; for, in the language of the Vedas, the seer of the mantra, the Rishi, is the poet. No doubt the age of the practical use of the Sanskrit language is past ; but today the truth has to be expressed in the various current languages. The Hindus in ancient times did not set any limits to seerhood. They have set forth even the mantras of the Koran in the Allah Upanishad. Rishis were born in all countries. *Mantras* also have been uttered in all languages. Today also the time has come for invoking the mantrashakti in the various current languages of the world. The modern age is rationalistic, so the language of this age has the definitiveness and clearness characteristic of intellectual discernment and reasoning. So the modern languages are not suitable for the sound-symbols like the Vedas or for the *Vija* mantras like the Tantra ; still mantras can be expressed in intellectual languages as we find in the Upanishads, the Gita and the Chandi. The intellectual language of man such as English

can be reformed, improved upon and turned into a language shaped in the light of the truth. Sri Aurobindo himself is the greatest example of this. All his compositions have the character of the mantra, they are luminous and throb with *mantrashakti*. All hearers and readers of his mantras cannot but render the highest homage of their heart to his Ishvari Gita, *The Mother*, which is the highest manifestation of the mantra. The last chapter of *The Mother* is *the* mantra of mantras, the mystery of mysteries,—for the seeker of knowledge it is the divine *Gāyatri* of *Parā Vidyā*, for the worker it is the resplendent staircase of truth, for the devotee it is the immortal message of divine love.

# Sri Aurobindo the Modern Messiah

BY DR. SUSHIL CHANDRA MITTER, M.A., D.Litt.

Our age undoubtedly needs an Avatār, for it markedly exhibits the characteristics, the decline of *dharma* and the rise of *adharma*, given by the Gita of an age when the Divine finds it necessary to incarnate Himself. How far the rationalist would believe in the fact of such an incarnation in a particular age when the given characteristics are prominent enough, and therefore the need for the incarnation not questioned, is a matter for controversy, which we shall avoid ; but the Light towards which the afflicted humanity must turn for guidance and solace is and must be self-revealing at source and is destined eventually to overcome the scepticism that may obstruct its self-propagation. While that seems yet to be a question of some time, it may nevertheless be pointed out in the meantime that it is precisely such a role that Sri Aurobindo's writings, and more specially his intensive *sādhana*, are to play in the drama of self-destruction that is unfolding before the humanity of to-day, and of reconstruction that is to unfold before the humanity of to-morrow.

What is most significant in this connection is that Sri Aurobindo is himself above the struggle in which the world is involved to-day. In serene detachment he is witnessing all the grim tragedies that are being enacted ; in infinite compassion he is emitting rays of light on the enveloping gloom ; with an unerring vision of the Truth he is arraying the forces of Knowledge against the forces of Ignorance. This is the crying need of the hour ; and our salutations to him who fulfils this need.

One of man's outstanding achievements in the development of his intellectual life has perhaps been to have hit upon one master idea, the idea of Evolution which has given him a clue to the Truth that is manifesting in him. Although incorporated in the body of human thought centuries ago, this idea has been employed with some degree of thoroughness only recently when all forms of life and existence so far manifested on earth have been comprehended in a continuous unity of development. Of this idea, Sri Aurobindo has brought out the implications in a manner that is at once a marvel and a solace ; for here lies

dormant the brightest hope for humanity, not merely the possibility but the inevitability of its salvation. In the continuous process of development of the different forms of existence, Nature has, it has been shown to us, successively and progressively overcome in the higher forms the limitations to which the lower forms had been subject. And so in the onward march of evolution, the limitations to which human life and consciousness are now subject are to be progressively and ultimately overcome. A divine life is promised to man here on earth, not in a world hereafter. The kingdom of Heaven on earth of which Christ spoke two milleniums ago is now held out not merely as the future hope but as the inevitable destiny of mankind. Sri Aurobindo has thus heralded the dawn of a new era of illumination that is to come upon humanity.

Nevertheless, torn as we are for the present by communal, national and international feuds, we may and do naturally expect of the modern Messiah to give us such light as would show us the way out of the hopeless mess that we have made of our life. A precise principle, a definite line of action to tide over the present crisis is what is immediately demanded. This is not the time, many of us may and do think, to indulge in metaphysical diatribes on the materialistic outlook on life and its excessive pre-occupation with things temporal and impermanent. We have now to reckon with forces that threaten to destroy our very existence on earth. Not to the philosopher, nor to the prophet, but to the general who can lead a victorious army across the battlefield must we now turn as our possible Saviour.

There is an element of truth in this line of thought, and we may continue to think like this for some time in future ; but such truth as is herein contained belongs to a lower level of consciousness out of which humanity is now struggling to rise into a higher level where it would no longer have any application. It is time that we ponder deeply and more deeply and yet more deeply on an old problem that has acquired such an immense complexity as to present entirely new features. Our battlefields have now extended so immeasurably beyond their original proportions that the general to lead a victorious army across them has made himself scarce. Everywhere, in every column from the first to the fourth, there is lurking the fifth. Over against the problem of the war-weary war-lord: how to win and what peace terms to dictate to the vanquished, has been posed the problem of the war-weary pacifist: how to yield and what peace



terms to dictate to the victor! In fact, while tanks devastate and bombs rain death and destruction, between victory and defeat the line of demarcation seems to be fast fading. If we are really to come to an end of our struggle, we have to revise fundamentally many of our old notions, discard old values and rise to an entirely higher level of consciousness.

Not to the general, therefore, who can only achieve dubious and short-lived victories, but to the poet, the philosopher, the prophet who can educate us to the new values that are emerging out of the present world-wide conflict, must we turn for guidance and sustenance. We need the imagination of the poet and the artist to weave a cosmos out of the chaos of materials that are being heaped upon us by the increasing contact between nations. We need the speculative insight of the philosopher to formulate ideals to press upon facts, to dynamise the truths yielded by Nature to the questionings of Science. And last but not the least, we need the prophet, not the foresight of the statesman and the diplomat who oftner than not miscalculates, the truth being to him only a secondary consideration, but the sweeping and unerring vision of the prophet to interpret to us the new tendencies that may be manifesting and to measure, direct and control the new forces that may be operating. And above all, in the midst of all the confusion created by the deafening clang and clatter of clashing arms, while we need, by all means, to resist aggression by armed force, we need even more to prevent it by spreading the light and the wisdom of the Yogin, by the gradual working of supramental gnosis descending upon our earth-consciousness. To whom, therefore, at this hour of crisis, can we turn but to the Saint of Pondicherry who combines all these roles in a marvellous synthesis?

Ever since he went into voluntary retirement, his one endeavour has been that mankind should awake to the latent possibilities in him and steadily develop forces to realise them. The Yogin of all yogins, his one aim has been not merely *his own* individual perfection and liberation, to that he certainly attaches great value as the necessary first step to the attainment of his nobler divine purpose,—but also the lifting up of the *entire* human race to the higher level of life and consciousness which is open to it. To this end has been directed his entire *sādhana*, his *karma* and his *jñanam*, his will-force and his knowledge-force in a single-pointed integrality. An idealist, every inch of his being, he is yet not a visionary idealist, but the keenest and the most acute observer of men and things. A dreamer, and a

colossal dreamer at that, he dreams and visualises with a clarity and a precision that are only his, and are yet to dawn upon others of the human race. So it is that he is imperceptibly but steadily marshalling the forces which are to bring down and establish on earth the harmony needed for the adjustment of the vast changes wrought by science in man's outer life to the life of his inner being. Indeed we may say with confidence and certitude that there has been no field of human endeavour but has been illuminated by his revealing analysis. If during this hour of peril and crisis, he continues to give us metaphysical dissertations, it is because he is the modern representative of that genius of India to whose perspective of eternity metaphysics could never be a merely intellectual pastime but always and inevitably an intensely practical necessity. With his thorough assimilation of the European culture which provided him the basis of his early education, he is the chosen instrument of God in this age to reveal to man His secret intention behind such a great impact as that between the continents of Europe and Asia. To the West which has to-day seized the material power for good or for evil, he is not merely interpreting the wisdom of the East, but presenting it in a new, living and dynamic form charged with all the forces of a great creation, greater than any that has so far been attempted. Through him to-day, India offers to the world a richer and a deeper synthesis of the material and the spiritual problems than has ever before been presented in history.

It is indeed idle and irrational to expect in any particular age that one who is believed to be an incarnation of the Godhead should prove that fact by miraculous feats. Incarnations have appeared on earth from age to age, but not until their missions have been fulfilled has the fact of their incarnation been clear to the minds of any but the few contemplative men. The Messiah will not, in a moment by a fiat of his will, destroy the evil forces of Darkness and Ignorance and establish forthwith the reign of Light and Truth on earth. That has never happened in history, just because the Divine Will cannot submit to and work under the direction of the human will, however noble, magnanimous and philanthropic. Whatever is happening in the world, it must be noted, is and has been willed by God, is part of Nature's evolutionary programme in a scheme definitely decreed, though with infinite freedom and possibilities of variation.

The present crisis has no doubt been precipitated by the

failure of man to envisage and define clearly an ideal form of unity for the expression of the collective life of diverse and heterogeneous groups of men who had developed in their own way their own culture and civilisation and have now come closer in a world rendered more compact by modern Science. Such an ideal has indeed, emerged vaguely into consciousness as a result of the pressure of circumstances, but it is high time that a sincere and strenuous, even if fruitless, effort be made to achieve the extremely difficult final harmony between the individual at one end and the highest aggregate, the totality of mankind at the other. Such a final harmony can only be achieved through a series of intermediate adjustments between the individual and a number of lesser aggregates which intervene as necessary stages of a progressive human culture. In his book "The Ideal of Human Unity", Sri Aurobindo takes great pains to examine the progress so far made, and indicate lines of possible further advance. Long experiments with mechanical administrative devices, he tells us, have so far resulted in the evolution of the Nation-unit as humanity's halting place in its progressive approach towards universality through larger and larger aggregates. A supra-national unit evolving out of the impact between European and Asiatic cultures might possibly have been the next step in this progressive aggregation, as demonstrating by the creation of new habits of mental attitude and common life, the practical possibility of unifying the whole human race in a single 'family'; but such a possibility has now been definitely excluded by the folly of statesmen, the formidable passion of the masses and the obstinate self-interest of established egoisms. New attempts at unification of large groups of men by political and administrative means after the manner of ancient Rome *cannot* in the modern conditions succeed. Their only possible result has been what we are witnessing to-day, the world-wide conflagration.

Not a world-state, therefore, but a free world-union founded on the principle of freedom and variation, is to be the ultimate basis of the final harmony to evolve between the individual and the collective life of humanity. How soon such a world-union would emerge depends upon various factors, the most important being the radical transformation of the Nation-Idëa, engendered by a total spiritual transformation of the individual, such as would enable him both as an individual and as a member of a spiritualised community to live in the Spirit rather than in his individual or group-egoism, yet losing none of his individual or

group-power to express in his own way, the divinity in him. Unfortunately, in the present state of man's mental and spiritual development, while he yet lives in the Ignorance, he lacks that unifying and harmonising knowledge which alone can reconcile the conflicting half-truths represented by individualism and communism. "That knowledge", Sri Aurobindo tells us, "belongs to a deeper principle of our being to which oneness and integrality are native. It is only by finding that in ourselves that we can solve the problem of our existence and with it the problem of the true way of individual and communal living." (*The Life Divine*, Vol. II, p. 1152).

In his numerous works, Sri Aurobindo throws light from diverse angles, such as may open the vision of persons belonging to various stadia of culture and development, on the path long and arduous to the finding of this deeper principle of our being which alone has this saving knowledge. Can we not, therefore, demand with faith and confidence that while wars are being fought and empires are tumbling, while statesmanship and military strategy are running headlong into bankruptcy, it is only meet and proper that we turn for light and guidance to this conscious embodiment of the Divine "Seer-Will" who reveals to humanity the significance behind its half-blind endeavours? As Sri Aurobindo himself puts it, "The Messiah or *Avatār* is nothing but this, the divine Seer-Will descending upon the human consciousness to reveal to it the divine meaning behind our half-blind action and to give along with the vision the exalted will that is faithful and performs and the ideal force that executes according to the vision". (*Ideal and Progress*, pp. 14-15).

With my salutation to this divine Seer-Will on the occasion of his seventy-first birthday, my one prayer to God is that humanity may hearken to His voice now articulate in His messenger while there is yet time.

# Para Prakṛtir Jivabhūta

(A criticism examined\*)

By T. V. KAPALI SASTRI

Sri Aurobindo's Essays on the Gita contain an early adumbration of the philosophy which is so magnificently expounded in The Life Divine. But the Essays were not written in the traditional spirit of orthodox exponents of systems, to win support for their teachings by proving their conformity to the accepted authorities. He saw that his own realisations bore testimony to the truths embodied in the teachings of the Gita and expounded it in the light of his wisdom for the benefit of those who are prepared to go from the letter of the scripture to the spirit beyond it. His unique contribution to the understanding of the Gita lies in his interpretation of the Purushottama doctrine—the three Purushas and the two Prakṛtis. A pregnant phrase in the Gita is "*parā prakṛtir jivabhūta*" which Sri Aurobindo explains as meaning "the Parā Prakṛti *has become* the Jīva". Objection is taken to this interpretation and it has been argued with a certain amount of plausibility that the compound *jivabhūta* according to the canons of Grammar cannot mean "become the Jīva", and to express this latter meaning we need the compound *jīvibhūta* and that is why Achārya Shankara has rightly taken it to mean "Jīva Itself". To persons not conversant with Sanskrit grammar, this argument presented with a show of learning may become a stumbling-block to the acceptance of Sri Aurobindo's interpretation, but a careful study of the relevant rules of Grammar will show convincingly that not only does Sri Aurobindo's interpretation do no violence to the language, but that in the context it is the right interpretation, the only interpretation possible. We are not concerned here to examine the general philosophic position of Shankara or to expound that of Sri Aurobindo, nor even to show that the latter conforms to the spirit of the teachings of the Upanishads and the Gita. We confine ourselves to this one point in Grammar and show that far from

\* *Indic Modern Review*, August 1942, page 177.

twisting the text to fit it to his own system, Sri Aurobindo explains the phrase naturally and in strict accordance with the precepts of grammar.

It has been urged that *jīvabhūtā* means *jīva* itself (the same as *jīva*) and that it can never mean what has become the *jīva*, and that for the latter sense the expression must be *jīvibhūtā*. We shall presently see that the latter compound should not be used in all cases of "becoming" and it can be used only under certain conditions, and where such conditions are not present we have to use the first compound to convey the sense of "becoming" and that Āchārya Shankara himself and others following him have done so.

Let us then study the import of the *taddhita* affix *cvi*, by which compounds like *jīvibhūtā* are formed, and understand where it could be used and where it should not, so that we can show that *bhū* in the sense of "become" can be and is used even when it is not preceded by *cvi*. The Sutra is "*kṛ-bhū' asti-yoge sampadya-kartari cviḥ*". "*Abhūta-tad-bhāve*" is the Vārtika on this Sutra of Pāṇini, V. 4. 50. The Vārtika is very important, so important that the Kāśikā reads it in the Sutra itself. "When the word expresses the new state attained by the agent and the verbs *kṛ*, *bhū*, and *as* are joined to it, the affix *cvi* comes after that word". The case of a thing arriving at a state of being what it was not is called "*abhūta-tad-bhāva*". That is to say, when something has become that which it was not previously, this affix *cvi* is added to the stem. Let us pause here and note the implication of the Vārtika. The *cvi* affix is added only when the agent completely changes and arrives at the modified state, "*yatra prakṛti-svarūpam eva vikāra-rūpatām āpadyamānam vivakṣyate*". Thus when we say "*paṭaḥ śuklī-bhavati*" the cloth has become white, we mean that the whole cloth has become white. If we mean a partial whitening, we have to say so expressly 'ekadeśena'. Pāṇini, V. 4. 52 gives optionally the affix *sāti* as a substitute for *cvi* to convey the sense of total change. *Cvi* by itself is used to convey the sense of total change. This will be obvious from Bhaṭṭojī's vṛtti on Pāṇini sutras, V. 4—50, 52, 53 in his Kaumudī.

Therefore, wherever the affix *cvi* does not apply, we use simply *bhūta* and form the compound "*sup supā*" (noun joined to a noun) in the sense of "become", for the root *bhū* means "to be" as well as "to become" as we shall see presently. Here the Gīta rightly avoids the *cvi* as it does not mean that the Supreme Nature in its totality has become the *jīva*. Sri Auro-

bindo has made it abundantly clear in the Essays that this Supreme Nature is not identical with the *jīva* in the sense "that there is nothing else or that it is only nature of becoming and not at all of being ; that could not be the supreme Nature of the Spirit . . . Even in time it is something more".

Now that we have shown why *bhūta* without a *cvi* is used in the sense of becoming, we shall proceed to point out that Āchārya Shankara and others following him have interpreted the compounds ending in *bhūta* as in Brahmbhūta, Jīvabhūta in the sense of becoming or attaining the state of Brahman, assuming the form of Jīva, as the case may be. Shankarananda is considered to be the most famous among the Advaitic commentators on the Gita. He says—*Jīvabhūtaḥ* "nāma-rūpa-vyākaraṇāya kṣetrajñātām gataḥ pramāta bhūtvā tiṣṭhati" (the eternal portion, *sanātana amśa* having attained or assumed the condition of *kṣetrajña*, the Knower of the field, for the purpose of manifesting or developing Name and Form, has become the cogniser). Note that *gataḥ* and *bhūtvā* connote respectively the senses of attaining a state and becoming. This Advaitin is no mean authority. Is he wrong in having rendered in this way *mamaiva amśaḥ sanātano jīvabhūtaḥ*? In unmistakable terms he has taken the compound to mean that the eternal portion of the Supreme has attained the state of *kṣetrajña* and has become the Cogniser (of course phenomenally, to meet the requirements of the doctrine of Māyā). Again, Shankara himself in his commentary on this verse is confronted with the question of the Partless *niramśa* having a part *amśa*. He explains *amśa jīvabhūta* (portion as jīva) to mean that the *jīva* is formed (apparently or illusorily) as a portion of Myself! (*sa ca jīvo mad-amśatvena kalpitaḥ*). These two instances are enough to show how *jīvabhūta* is construed by Shankara and another of the same school. Shankara himself earlier in the commentary rightly takes *amśa* as the *uddeśya* and *jīva* as the *vidheya*; that means that *amśa* or portion is the subject and *jīvatva* or the state of *jīva* is predicated of it. He could have straightly said *amśaḥ jīvatvena kalpitaḥ*. For the purpose of his philosophy he makes the *jīva* appear as formed into the *amśa* of the Supreme. Be it as it may; what matters is that the act of forming or attaining or becoming is implicit in these renderings of *jīvabhūta* and Shankarananda quoted above makes it quite explicit.

Let us take another example of a compound ending in *bhūta* and show from Shankara's commentary on the Gita that

becoming or attaining is implicit in the sense of the compound. "*brahma-bhūtaḥ*" Ch. XVIII. 54. Shankara says "*brahma prāptaḥ*"; that is—one who has attained the Brahman. He does not say that it is the same as Brahman or Brahman itself, as the critic holds. According to the critic, the compound here must be rendered as 'the same as Brahman', 'Brahman Itself', but Shankara holds differently. Why does he use the verb *pra-āp* in explaining *brahma-bhūta* as *brahma prāptaḥ*? Here it is necessary to consider the Sanskrit verbs that are commonly used to denote 'becoming'. Pāṇini uses the verb *sam-pad* as in *sampadya-kartari* V. 4. 50, *abhividyau sampadā* V. 4. 53. The act of attaining the state of something or somebody is the meaning of the verb; and because this *sampatti* is the same as *prāpti* (attainment), Shankara has rendered *brahma-bhūtaḥ* into *brahma prāptaḥ* (one who has attained the state of Brahman). Here he has rightly taken the verb *bhū* to mean 'to become', *sampad*; only he has used the transitive verb *pra-āp*.

*Bhū* is often used in the sense of becoming; forms derived from it are often so used. We shall again quote Shankara from his commentary on the Gita, Ch. XIII. 30. *Brahma sampādyate, brahmaiva bhavati* ('he attains Brahman' means 'he becomes Brahman'). The Tikākāra Ānandagiri gives a note on this, '*brahma-sampattir nāma pūrṇatvena abhiviyakti-hetoḥ sarvasya ātma-sātkrītatvāt ca, brahmaiveti*'—*brahma-sampatti* means "becoming Brahman or being Brahman itself", because of the manifestation in fullness and of all being the Self". Again Ch. XVIII. 54,—"*brahma-bhūyāya kalpate*"—*brahma-bhavanāya samartho bhavati*. On this Ānandagiri says, *brahmaṇo bhavanam, anusandhāna-paripāka-paryantam sāksāt karaṇam*'. (Calm continuous search or enquiry ripens into realisation—this is called attaining the state of Brahman or becoming Brahman).

Thus it will be seen that the verbs *bhū* and *sam-pad* are used in the sense of becoming. We have given instances mainly from the Gita and its Advaitic commentators. But if we turn to the Upanishads, we can better appreciate the phrases of the Gita, *bhūta-bhāvana*, *bhūtabhāvōdbhāvakara*, *madhāvabhāvita*, *brahmabhūya*, *brahmabhūta*, *jīvabhūta*, etc. The Advaitin Nīlakaṇṭha, the commentator on the Mahābhārata in explaining the verse XV. 7, quotes the Taittiriya Upanishad II. 6. (*Tat sṛṣṭvā tadevānuprāviśat . . . satyam abhavat*) to show that it is Brahman that has become everything, *abhavat*. The conception of becoming is essential, indispensable for a proper under-



standing of the Gita and the Upanishads. The root *bhū* served the purpose of the ancient seers and thinkers to denote becoming or manifestation which was also their conception—or, shall we say, perception—of the truth of Creation. We may note, for instance, that *bhava* means birth which is manifestation and does not mean existence for which the root *as* is used,—*sat*, existence. But this distinction is not always made in common usage. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to ignore the radical significance of these words in the ancient texts. And it is because the commentators were aware of the sense of becoming attached to *bhū* that they have rendered the term *jīva-bhūta* in the way that we have shown from their writings.

Thus far we have made mention of the Advaitic commentaries on the Gita and cited instances of the usage of *bhūta* in the sense of 'attained the state of' or 'become'. It is superfluous to multiply citations from the vast field of Sanskrit literature in general; nevertheless, it would be profitable to go straight to the source-books on Sanskrit grammar and consult standard authorities on the point at issue. When we do so and examine passages that are relevant for our enquiry, we find that the great grammarians have settled the question and decisively put a final seal on the derivative significance of *bhūta* at the end of compounds such as *pramāṇa-bhūta*, *jīva-bhūta*, etc. In the Mahābhāṣya, the monumental gloss of Patañjali on Pāṇini's sutras, we meet with the phrase *pramāṇa-bhūta ācāryaḥ* under the Vṛddhi-samjñā-sutra. Kaiyaṭa's note on it reads, "*prāmāṇyam prāpta ity'arthaḥ*", meaning "the *ācārya* who has attained (the position of) authority". He further elucidates the phrase *pramāṇa-bhūta* by deriving *bhūta* from *bhū prāptau*, a root of the tenth conjugation. Here arises a doubt; if *bhū* is taken as a tenth conjugational root and the past participle *ta* is suffixed to it, the result would be *bhāvita* and not *bhūta*. But it is cleared thus: there is a group of fifty roots including the root *bhū prāptau* in the tenth conjugation which optionally drop the tenth conjugational sign *ṇic* (aya) (*A dhṛṣād vā; vibhāṣita-nickāḥ*); so much so that the third person present singular is *bhāvayate* or *bhavate* and the past part. is *bhāvita*, or *bhūta*, which means *prāpta*, as Kaiyaṭa has explained. Commenting on this passage of Kaiyaṭa, Nāgeśa in his Uddyota explains the necessity of deriving *bhūta* from *bhū* of the tenth conj. which means 'to attain' or 'to obtain'. He says that as *bhū* of the 1st conj. means 'to be' or 'to be born', there will have to be *cvi* before it, thereby conveying the sense of a total change of the

agent—which in the example is *ācārya*—into the thing denoted by the word (*pramāṇa*) preceding *bhūta*. In that case it would be *pramāṇībhūta*. As that is not the sense meant to be conveyed, that is to say, as what is meant is not that the *ācārya* has completely changed into *pramāṇa*, we avoid the *cvi* and mean by the phrase *pramāṇa-bhūta ācāryaḥ* 'the *ācārya*, who has modally become the authority' *pramāṇam ācāryaḥ prakāśāntareṇa bhūtaḥ*.

This is interesting and precisely applicable to the case of '*parā prakṛtir jivabhūtā*'. By adapting Nagesha's language, we may say, '*parā prakṛtir jivabhūta*' means '*jivaḥ parā prakṛtiḥ prakāśāntareṇa bhūtā*', the Supreme Nature has modally attained the state of Jīva. Again, it would be instructive to note what the Chāyā, Vaidyanātha's annotation on Nagesha, says in this connection. It puts the pertinent question: "if *pramāṇa-bhūta* means the same as *pramāṇa*, then *pramāṇam* alone would do; why should there be *bhūta* added to it?" The answer is that *pramāṇa-bhūta* is not the same as *pramāṇa*; it means *pramāṇa-bhāvita* which is the same as *pramāṇyam prāpta*. From the foregoing brief discussion it would be clear that *pramāṇam* is not the same as *pramāṇībhūta* or *pramāṇa-bhūta*; these three expressions differ in their significances and are not interchangeable.\*

Now let us take the present case of *parā prakṛtir jivabhūtā*. If it be meant that the Supreme Nature is the same as Jīva or the Jīva Itself, then the expression would be '*parā prakṛtir Jīvaḥ*'; if it were intended to convey the sense that *parā prakṛti*, the Supreme Nature has *completely* changed and become in its totality the Jīva, then *parā prakṛtir jivabhūtā* would be the phrasing; but when it is not meant that the Supreme Nature has absolutely changed into and therefore in that sense become the Jīva or that it is itself the Jīva or the same as Jīva, but meant that the Supreme Nature is the Jīva in some way or mode, *prakāra*, to use the word of the grammarian quoted already, or in some aspect or part, *aṁśa*, as the Gita

\* When earlier in the *Mahābhāṣya* Kaiyaṭa explains '*sāmānya-bhūtam*' as '*sāmānyam tva*', the Uddyota dissents from the view that the word *bhūta* can be treated as *upamā-vācaka*; but it has been the convention to resolve the compounds, such as *pitr-bhūta* into *pitrā tulyaḥ* or *samaḥ*, 'like a father'. This is indeed loosely done; but it is taken to be equivalent to *pitrvaṁ prāptaḥ* 'attained the position of a father' which is the same as 'become a father in a way' *prakāśāntareṇa pitā bhūtaḥ*. The same applies to *paṇya-bhūtam śaritam*, the body has attained the state of an article of merchandise, which is the same as saying loosely that the body is an article of merchandise; the same is the case with other expressions such as *aṅgabhūta* or *aṁśabhūta*, 'has attained the status of or become a limb or a part'.

reminds us, then the correct expression is none other than the one that we have discussed, *parā prakṛtir jīvabhūtā*.

And this is precisely the construction put upon the phrase in Sri Aurobindo's exposition of the Gita: for in unequivocal terms he has reiterated the idea that the Supreme Nature is the nature of the One Supreme Spirit which is higher than its manifestation as Jīva, that it is not in its essence the Jīva, Jīvātmikā, but it is Jīvabhūtā, has formulated itself as Jīva providing a spiritual basis for the manifold becoming in the cosmos. Tested and thus dissolved, the difficulty of grammar that ushered in the objection turns helpful, leaving us to appreciate better the interpretation of the great phrase rich with profound thought—an interpretation which, as has been shown, is in perfect accord with the usage and strictly conforms to the canons of Sanskrit grammar.

